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EDUCATION AND THE UNIVERSITY:

SKETCH FOR AN ENGLISH SCHOOL

CAN any teacher in a university School of English, engaging to-day in the appropriate stocktaking, feel comfortable as he contemplates, in relation to the notions he likes to entertain of his function and responsibility, what is actually, his searching of his experience tells him, effected in their name? Even where literature has been emancipated from linguistic and philology, are things as they should be? Especially here, as a matter of fact, is there uneasiness, following on a confidence that was new twenty years ago. Has English been justifying its recognized position as chief of the humanities and its key responsibility for education? Can it even be said, by standards appropriate to the university level, to have been providing an *education* at all? Mustn't an education, properly so-called, involve a discipline? and isn't a discipline notably what English has, in this period of emancipation and high prestige, not provided? The charge is hard to resist, and there is certainly good reason for dissatisfaction.

The more need, then, is there to resist proposals for remedying the defect by bringing in the discipline from outside, whether by reinstating the linguistic and philological compulsions, or introducing some Classics, or having recourse to the new science of Semasiology, or by contriving tests and exercises in 'English Usage' or the 'Use of English.' All these candidates, both the more and the less respectable, are, in relation to an English School, *Ersatz,* and are to be resisted as inimical to the recognition and practice of the essential discipline. The essential discipline of an English School is the literary-critical; it is a true discipline, only in an English School if anywhere will it be fostered, and it is of inestimable value. It trains, in a way no other discipline can, intelligence and sensibility together, cultivating a sensitiveness and precision of response and a delicate integrity of intelligence—

intelligence that integrates as well as analyses and must have pertinacity and staying power as well as delicacy.

True, it is a discipline that lends itself to effective recognition in the academic world much less readily than the proposed substitutes do. There might be said to be a natural antipathy between it and the academic mind. And acquaintance with examination papers in ' practical criticism ' and with published exercises in up-to-date critical method by advanced academics might be said to justify the most uncomfortable doubts. Yet apart from it literary education is null, and worse. It is what we have to contend and work for. And though we can hardly hope ever to have it in an English School fully as it ought to be, the active informing spirit of the whole, yet formal recognition is something: it permits good work to be done. And a little good work, a little of the real thing, can have great effect and go a long way. If he can come on stimulus, demonstration and suggestive practice somewhere, the intelligent man gets his start.

But the difficulties and adverse chances being what they are, we ought to be ready to say very clearly what an English School could, under the right conditions, propose as the scope and profit of a literary training. To talk of training sensibility and intelligence may seem to have a narrowly limiting suggestion, as if it were merely a matter of ' practical criticism ' work upon short poems and odds and ends. But of course that kind of work can have continuous developments into the completest kind of interpretative and evaluative criticism. The induction into such advanced work clearly demands a most delicate tact on the part of the guide, and there are considerations to be borne in mind regarding the immaturity and inexperience of undergraduates. But the same considerations apply to work commonly prescribed in academic routine (we wrote essays on Shakespeare at school), and humane education is an accepted institution. What is in question is how the ability to profit by experience, and with it the achievement of maturity, may best be furthered. The kind of work advocated entails, in its irreplaceable discipline, a most independent and responsible exercise of intelligence and judgment on the part of the student. The more advanced the work the more unmistakably is the judgment that is concerned inseparable from that profoundest sense of relative value which determines, or should determine, the important

choices of actual life. There is no need to develop this point; and no need to add more by way of indicating the inherent educational possibilities of the literary-critical discipline than that it can, in its peculiar preoccupation with the concrete, provide an incomparably inward and subtle initiation into the nature and significance of tradition.

Nevertheless, no one of even the most fortunate experience can believe that, even if an adequate conception were made fully operative, a literary education would be satisfactory by itself. The more one believes in the relevant discipline, the less is one likely to feel happy about permitting undergraduates to devote the years of an 'Honours' course to literary studies alone. One of the virtues of literary studies is that they lead constantly outside themselves, and, on the other hand, while it is necessary that they should be controlled by a concern for the essential discipline, such a concern, if it is adequate, counts on associated work in other fields. In fact, a serious interest in the problem is an interest in the problem of liberal education, the solution of which cannot be in terms of literary training alone: we are back at issues canvassed here before.

It is half-a-dozen years since, under the title *Why Universities?*[1], there appeared in these pages an inquiry into that problem—the problem of the performance, in relation to the modern world, of what should be the university's constitutive function. The inquiry confined itself for the most part to generalities, which were offered as clearing the way for going further into the particular and the practical as occasion might arise. Since then, it is true, there has appeared[2] a discussion of the special difficulties that have to be faced in the modern universities. But, as a view of those difficulties makes plain, if the problem is to be seriously tackled it must be at the ancient universities; and, apart from a critique of Modern Greats, there has been in these pages no further

[1]See *Scrutiny* for September, 1934. Since the necessary background to the present 'sketch' was presented in that article, and recapitulation is hardly practicable, there is nothing for it but to refer the reader back. The number is still obtainable of Messrs. Deighton, Bell and Co., Trinity Street, Cambridge.

[2]See *Scrutiny* for March, 1938.

going into ' the particular and the practical ' of the problem as it presents itself there. Not that there has been any lack of impulse and incitement. If occasion has been implicitly judged not to have arisen, that has been on considerations of tact and delicacy: there would be no point in making a show of going further if one were not prepared to be decidedly particular in positive suggestion, to the extent of seeming to usurp the office of an authorized committee on reform. Now, however, the war, by common consent an occasion for radical searchings and stocktakings, may perhaps be made to yield something of a licence.

Statements of general principle may in any case be advanced without impropriety. Challenged, then, to say how one's generalities could be brought into any relation with practice, how one's principles could be put into effect, here is the reply. It is a completion of the statement of principles, of ' general lines,' which without such elaboration are not really present to be considered. At the same time the practical intention is completely serious. If the necessary authority and facilities could be obtained, some such scheme as this could be made to justify itself convincingly in practice—the proponent asks nothing better, the experiment being given a fair chance, than to be allowed to co-operate in the demonstration: that is the spirit of the proffered ' sketch.'

But first there must be a minimum recall of generalities, for though the reader is referred back to *Why Universities?* (in which use was made of *The Experimental College* and of an essay by Mr. Brooks Otis), it is necessary to ensure that certain considerations should be immediately present here.

(1) The problem of a liberal education for the present time proposes itself at first sight as that of producing the Educated Man, conceived in terms of the needs and conditions of the modern world. Civilization having ceased to find a centre—centre of co-ordination and of consciousness—in the ' unity of the Educated Class and the unity of the Educated Mind in terms of the ideas of its own age '[3], it is an ' urgently necessary work . . . to explore the means of bringing the various kinds of specialist knowledge and training into effective relation with informed general intelligence, humane culture, social conscience and political will.

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[3]Mr. Brooks Otis. (The other quotations are from the present writer.)

Indicated here we have the function that is pre-eminently the university's; if the work is not done there it will not be done anywhere.'

(2) In fact, the problem of producing the 'educated man' —the man of humane culture who is equipped to be intelligent and responsible about the problems of contemporary civilization— becomes that of realizing the Idea of a University in practical dispositions appropriate to the modern world. This readjustment of focus means a recognition that the problem cannot be 'properly envisaged with an eye fixed narrowly upon the desired student-product of an educational *regime*—envisaged, that is, in terms of a standard "educated man" to be produced.'

(3) Specialization is the face with which the problem confronts us when we ask how, in practice, the function ascribed to the university can be performed. How to devise a broad education that shall not run to sciolism, dissipation and smattering? But there can be no question of pronouncing that the university exists to produce *not* the specialist *but* the 'educated man.' 'Its essential function involves the production of both—though to say "the educated man" is perhaps misleading. The problem is to produce specialists who are in touch with a humane centre, and to produce a centre for them to be in touch with; but this centre is not best conceived as a standard "educated man." There will be "educated men" with various stresses, various tendencies towards specialization.'

A rider to this last paragraph is, of course, that there will be no one solution of the problem. If we are to hope for anything, it is for various partial solutions at different places, as particular opportunities are seized, particular conditions taken advantage of. What follows is suggestion how something might be made of one particular opportunity that offers itself at one particular place—the place where the writer happens to be. Particularity of the kind is essential if the matter is to be carried further, as it seems urgent it should be now (since we mean to have a future); and the given particularity is that which lies within the scope of the given writer.

And actually the English Tripos at Cambridge might be held to be as promising an opportunity as the academic world has to offer. Firstly, there is the emancipation from Anglo-Saxon and the

associated encumbrances; the school is based, if on anything, on an idea of criticism as a discipline—of the critical study of literature as a training of sensibility and intelligence. Secondly, there is the recognition, however inadequate in effect, of the need both for some work outside the student's own language and for relating literary studies with work that goes outside literature in the restrictive sense. The question is, what might be done to make out of these advantages and formal recognitions something substantial in practice—something as adequate as possible in the way of a ' partial solution.'

The ' what might be done,' however, is to give as little excuse as possible for the dismissive ' Utopian '; the avowed practical spirit dictates a considered modesty of proposal. The aim is to suggest nothing more than, once embodied in the report of an authorized committee, would, it can be imagined, have a good chance of being implemented by authority. That being so we must recognize at once that there would be no profit in proposing a reform, on the lines in view, of the whole Tripos. Part I, which is taken by great numbers, would be left as it is. For one thing, there would be no chance, under any foreseeable state of university economy, of getting provision for the number of ' lecturers ' or ' supervisors ' that the inclusive reform would demand. Or perhaps the first criticism that would occur to those whose views would have to be consulted first would be that the imposition of the high standard implied in such proposals would so reduce the number of students reading ' English ' as to ruin the finances of the school.

The proposals, then, concern Part II alone, which is taken by a comparatively small number of students. It can (be it noted by readers unfamiliar with Cambridge arrangements) be proceeded to as their necessary second part by students who have taken parts of other triposes—there is a variety of possible combinations. To attract as many such students as possible would be a part of the aim—as many, that is, of the kind for whom a recognized severity of standard would be one of the attractions. For the reformed Part II—this would be a condition of its influence and importance—would be essentially designed for an *élite*. That it would, if the design were realized, have an important influence on Part I as well as in other directions, seems reasonable to expect. To be content with modest numbers, but to provide a standard, a centre and a

source of stimulus and suggestion—that would be the aim.

For Part II as at present constituted the candidate has to take half-a-dozen papers (there are certain options) at the end of a course of study of either one or two years. (Most ordinarily the student, having taken his first part at the end of his second year, goes on to qualify for his degree at the end of the third year, but of course the greater the number that could arrange to spend two years over Part II the better). Whether he was proceeding from Part I or not, the Part II student would be assumed to have the equipment that Part I exists to provide. That is, he would be assumed to have a knowledge of English literature from Chaucer to the present day, and (what ' knowledge ' here implies) to be practised in judgment, critical analysis and intelligent discussion both of literature and of critical questions. The student coming over from another Tripos would presumably have known beforehand what he was going to do, and have been reading accordingly. With any luck (and such luck oughtn't to be unusual) he would have got his start in the Fifth Form, and provision would have been made at the university to give him during his first two years guidance, stimulus and some help in acquiring critical method. It would be one of the merits of the proposed scheme that it would encourage men to carry on serious reading in English literature while engaged primarily in other studies.

The question, 'Why *English* School?', that might be expected in view of what follows is answered by anticipation. ' English,' because it is a humane school, and the non-specialist intelligence in which the various studies are to find their centre is to be one that gets its own special training in literature. Its special—but not specialist—discipline is to be the literary-critical, a discipline of sensibility, judgment and thought which, of its essential nature, is concerned with training a non-specialist intelligence. About the importance of the special discipline and the seriousness with which it is regarded there must be no doubt. The test by examination would here have a place. Students, whether coming on from Part I or not, would know that, at the end of their course, they would have to take papers of the ' Practical Criticism ' kind—there is no reason why there shouldn't be a number of them. On these papers there would be passages of verse and prose to be assigned, on analytic grounds, to period, and also, perhaps, passages to be assigned to

their authors. Tests of this kind would be an effective way of insisting on an acquaintance both intelligent and extensive with English Literature. There would also be varied exercises testing perception, judgment and powers of critical analysis. The objections lying against the examination that means a race of the pen against the clock (and a race upon which everything is staked) would not lie against such ' Practical Criticism ' papers. There would be no string of essays to scribble in three hours, with journalistic facility and that athletic endurance which has nothing to do with the qualities that should properly be tested; and the clock loses its disturbing power when time is clearly ample for what has to be done. A further requirement would be a number of reviews, some, though not necessarily all, of recent books—reviews of fiction, verse and criticism.

These reviews would not be written under examination conditions, and as has just been intimated, the end-of-course examination would not be the general means of testing and placing students. It has already been concluded (see *Why Universities?*) that there would be little point in discussing any mere change in curriculum by itself: a radical reform must dislodge the examination from its stultifying tyranny, and, moreover, include a change in ' system of instruction or guidance.' The student, then, would be tested mainly by work done during the course, the major part of it substantial pieces of writing of a kind to be described later. As for the ' system of instruction or guidance,' the present provision of lectures and one-hour-a-week ' supervision,' it is widely recognized among both the parties chiefly concerned, doesn't nearly meet the need of the student. What he asks for (and it is the intelligent and self-reliant student whose needs are in question) is not more shepherding, but conditions that would enable him to carry on with independent work more profitably. As things are, left to himself but for lectures and the one hour's supervision a week, with a vast mass of reading in front of him for dealing with which he has nothing like adequate experience, he is apt to sink into a desperate bored industry—the boredom being the more oppressive because of choked and thwarted interest.

It is absurd that last year's schoolboy should be flung into a wilderness of books and abandoned to his own resources in this way. Officially, of course, lectures are intended to provide the

necessary stimulus, guidance, command of instrumental ideas and contact with experienced minds. Officially—but does anyone really suppose they do? Few students suppose it. There is, in fact, a widespread feeling that the time (and whatever else) assigned to lectures should be employed in more profitable ways, and there has been a great deal of demand of late among students for organized discussion-work. There may be a case for some lectures, but even if lectures were better than they commonly are, the lecture-method could not provide what the student needs. It is plain, on the other hand, that the method of planned and prepared discussion, involving concerted reading and some written work is capable of most fruitful applications: a full and flexible use of discussion and seminar procedures would be an essential part of the proposed scheme. For the seniors responsible for planning and guidance it would mean, of course, labour and exposure to education. But such labour and exposure, once made possible by a properly provided-for system, would be rewards in themselves to those whose satisfaction is in seeing their function justified in effectual practice.

It is now possible, after these preliminaries, to proceed to the major proposal in the matter of curriculum. The English Tripos as it now stands provides, under Part II, for an optional paper called *Special Period of English Literature,* the period varying from year to year. Let us instead (one might say, politicly finding sanctions as much as possible in existing provisions) prescribe for all students a study of the Seventeenth Century—the Seventeenth Century, not merely in literature, but as a whole; the Seventeenth Century as a key phase, or passage, in the history of civilization. The seriously and sedulously pursued aim would be to give real effect to the intention represented as things stand by the optional paper on *The English Moralists,* the obligatory paper, *Tragedy,* and the nugatory *Life and Thought* (*Literature, Life and Thought*) provisions of Part I—for the need, recognized in that *Literature, Life and Thought* formula, to relate a literary training to other disciplines and studies, gets as things stand little beyond the formal recognition.

The reasons for choosing the given period are contained in that phrase thrown out above, 'key passage in the history of civilization.' The Seventeenth Century is pre-eminently that; and (with, of course, some reference outside) it lends itself admirably to study—integrating study—in terms of England. It is at one end

in direct and substantial continuity with the world of Dante, and it shows us at the other a world that has broken irretrievably with the mediæval order and committed itself completely to the process leading directly and rapidly to what we live in now. In the course of it capitalism 'arrives,' finally overcoming the traditional resistances, so that its ethos becomes accepted as law, morality and controlling spirit in the economic realm; the age of parliamentary rule begins, as does that of economic nationalism; crucial issues in the relations between church and state, the spiritual and the secular, religion and the individual, are decided in a spirit going against the tradition of centuries—the principle of toleration is established along with that of 'business is business'; the notion of society as an organism gives way to that of society as a joint stock company[4]; science launches decisively on its triumphant accelerating advance.

The mention of these main heads is enough to enforce the point that the study of the Seventeenth Century is a study of the modern world; that it involves an approach to the characteristic problems of the modern world that answers admirably to our requirements. For the Seventeenth Century is *not* the modern world, and the study of it lends itself to the attainment of those ends which, in The Experimental College as described by Dr. Meiklejohn, were sought through comparative studies of Athenian civilization and modern America. Such a study would have the necessary comprehensiveness, complexity and unity: it would be a study in concrete terms of the relations between the economic, the political, the moral, the spiritual, religion, art and literature, and would involve a critical pondering of standards and key-concepts—order, community, culture, civilization and so on.

It has been assumed that the focus of attention would be in England, but of course there could be no such study of the English Seventeenth Century that didn't go abroad. To say this is to give force to the doubt that must now be anticipated: doesn't the proposed scheme (the full scope of which has not yet been indicated) much exceed the limits of what can reasonably be considered possible for the student in view? This doubt might be a difficult one to dispose of if the proposal were merely to replace one set of papers by another, equally to be taken at the end of the course

[4]See R. H. Tawney, *Religion* and the Rise of Capitalism, p. 175.

as the decisive test by which the candidate is to be placed.—Though it might have been asked in reply whether what is at present formally required of the student is really less formidable—or would be, if the prescription were taken seriously. The answer, of course, as everyone knows, is that prescription is one thing, practice another. The candidate has a great deal of choice, we say, referring to the examination paper. This means in practice that the good student (the kind that gets Firsts) doesn't work at the various prescribed fields to acquire a knowledge that will be tested in the examination room; he works (inevitably, as things are) *for* the examination, with an economy dictated by a study of back-papers (there can't be much variety among fair papers), to acquire a safe minimum, so that he can count on being able to do the duly distributed amount of unloading possible in the desperate scribbling of half-a-dozen three-hour periods. 'These are my three (or four) "questions," with one to spare, in case of bad luck.' That this is the way of working for the Tripos the examiner and the supervisor know as well as the candidate. For the examiner the knowledge is depressing. As he tries to get everything into the paper ('I can't leave so-and-so out: some man may be banking on him) without too obviously repeating last year's questions or producing a draft the size of a pamphlet, a sense of futility is apt to come over him. And (a feeling often expressed) why all this corrugation and sweat excogitating properly pointed question-formulations, when one knows that the candidate will unload anyway what he has ready to deliver on the given topic ("question"), and much in the form in which he has it ready? For the supervisor too the knowledge is depressing, or should be. For the keen and intelligent student it certainly is, as he watches the good student, the 'sure First,' practising Tripos-economy, and realizes how different a thing is disinterested study of a given field from acquiring cannily what can be mobilized to effect in three or four scrawled answers to a three-hour examination paper—a kind of agility that in any case his habits of discipline and conscience (which advanced education should strengthen and refine) inhibit in him.

For the student under the proposed scheme the situation and prospect would be different. He would start under the guidance of an inclusive and unifying purpose. He would have acquired full consciousness of this purpose and its implications (and confidence

that it was to be taken seriously and would guide also his advisers and teachers) in preliminary discussions which would have been held at the end of the previous academic year, before the Long Vacation preceding the first formal term of the course. These discussions would have dealt both with the general problem of humane education (*The Experimental College* or any other suitable texts being used) and with the reasons for choosing the Seventeenth Century for special study. Here a second point of difference has been brought in—the use of the methods of discussion and seminar. Discussion work, co-ordinated with reading and some writing, would be planned to explore key-aspects of the century and cover the main heads of inquiry. And, thirdly, the student would know that, so far as this part of the syllabus was concerned, he would be judged, not on his showing in an end-of-course examination, but on work done during the course, and in particular on three or four careful and extended pieces of writing.

Here some particularity is desirable, and to be able to give the kind of detailed illustration supplied by Dr. Meiklejohn in his report on the Experimental College would be a great advantage. But this is not a report. And even a detailed tentative scheme for an experimental start presupposes a good deal of collaboration and committee-work, involving consultation with specialists and a play of criticism. However, the possibilities may be sufficiently suggested by jotting down a rough list of heads and topics such as a committee might have before it when organizing work for the year—planning discussions, providing for specialist help and considering what kinds of combination of themes students might be allowed to choose for their extended pieces of writing:

The background in religious history.
Calvinism to Puritan individualism.
Puritan to Nonconformist.
Church and State.
Tolerance.
'The England of Shakespeare and Bacon was still largely mediæval.'
The rise of Capitalism.
Economic individualism.

The alleged relation with Protestantism.
The causes of the Civil War: the relation between the religious, the political and the economic.
The reaction against Whig history.
The Restoration ethos: social, literary and cultural changes.
The development of Augustanism.
The new science. Philosophical developments.
Political thought: 'The great and chief end of men uniting into Commonwealths and putting themselves under government is the preservation of their property.'
The Revolution of 1688 and its significance.
The social-economic correlations of literary history.
The changing relations between sophisticated and popular culture.
The evidence regarding popular culture.
The significance of the history of the Theatre.
The rise of the Press.
General comparison with French development. Some particular comparisons.

These rough jottings, of course, do not represent anything like an organization of work on the century, and the actual scheme of discussions and seminars could only be determined in immediate touch with practice, and by those empowered and immediately responsible. But the aims would be to provide specialist guidance where necessary, and, while ensuring a due intensiveness of consideration at key-places, to ensure also that, whatever a given student's distribution of interest, he should have an understanding of the main aspects of the century in their mutual relations, a grasp of the lines of co-ordination and the integrating themes and a due sense both of complexities and of the whole in perspective. As for his 'pieces of work,' the principle controlling his choice of themes (to be determined in consultation with authority) would be that they should entail his approaching the century at different key-points and from different angles, so that, though he wouldn't have distributed his attention equally over the whole century in all its aspects, he would nevertheless have gained a more than superficial acquaintance with the whole. An apparently very limited theme

may, in the treatment, become a perspective of a wide and varied range from a particular point of view. For instance, attempting to explain the decisive appearance of modern prose in the first decade of the Restoration, a student would find himself invoking something like the whole history of the century, political, economic, social and intellectual. And the student who, in addition to such a piece of work on prose, should have done one on the relations between sophisticated and popular culture in the period, one on the causes of the Civil War and one on the new science (no pretence of appropriate formulation is made in these suggestions) would have done more than write four essays on circumscribed subjects. He would have acquired a better knowledge of the period than a man, preparing under the present system the sufficient number of likely ' questions ' with an eye to what can be unloaded in a half or three-quarter-hour's race against the clock, is likely to acquire of any field of study.

These ' pieces of work ' would be done by a student who was participating in relevant discussion-group work (in connection with which there would be a certain amount of writing of the kind a man now does for his supervisor, and, presumably, note-taking), but they would entail sustained independent reading, exploration and following-up. And all this work, of all kinds, would have been done in the light of a dominant preoccupation, a major guiding and sensitizing interest—the preoccupation and the interest represented by another ' piece of work ' that the student would have it in front of him to do. This is a summing-up, an evaluating survey, of the changes taking place in the period—the changes as they affect one's sense of England as a civilization, a civilized community, a better or worse place to have been born in, to have belonged to, to have lived in. This requirement would need careful phrasing, but the intention as it is expressed here should be plain enough for the present purpose. The student, it will be seen, would have to ponder his criteria, and that would mean a good deal of thinking and stocktaking of peculiarly valuable kinds. There would obviously be an implicit bearing on the present. In fact, the end would be attained that there was a first thought of seeking through a comparison between Seventeenth-Century England and England of to-day—a comparison the preparation for which might well have started with a reading of Macaulay's third chapter (which

should be read in any case).

This evaluating paper brings to the fore the justification for assigning all this non-literary work to an English School. It has already been insisted that the student should be assumed to be qualified in literature—to be critically intelligent about it, to have a trained sensibility and to be familiar with the range, variety and order of the English tradition. This assumption would be backed by the provision, referred to earlier, of papers of a ' Practical Criticism ' kind, which every student would be faced with taking at the end of the course and which he would know it was of the utmost importance to make a good showing upon. (There would also be provision for work of this kind during the course). It is of the essence of the scheme that the work of all kinds would be done by the ' literary mind ' (to redeem a label that has been used injuriously); by, that is, an intelligence with the sensitiveness, the flexibility and the disciplined and mature preoccupation with value that should be the product of a literary training. It is an intelligence so trained that is best fitted to develop into the central kind of mind, the co-ordinating consciousness, capable of performing the function assigned to the class of the educated. And it is in the kind of activity represented specifically by the proposed evaluating ' piece of work ' that a literary mind finds its proper development—the completer activity towards which its trainings tends and which its habit implies.

The extraordinary richness in literature of the Seventeenth Century is one of the reasons for choosing the period. Not of course that it would be merely in a use of the literary evidence that the ' literary mind ' would be manifested; it would be present generally in a tact and delicacy of interpretation, an awareness of complexities, and a sense of the subtle ways in which, in a concrete cultural situation, the spiritual and the material are related. But the literature of the century, which bears interesting and illuminating relations to the changing social and cultural background and demands study in that respect, does serve invaluably both as evidence in the ways illustrated by L. C. Knights in *Drama and Society in the Age of Ben Jonson,* and as an index in ways suggested by T. S. Eliot's observation: ' The age of Dryden was still a great age, though beginning to suffer a certain death of the spirit, as the coarsening of its verse-rhythms shows.'

The student capable of appreciating such an observation will not find the summing-up of the century a simple business, yielding an obvious quantity as the result. Just as the most anti-modernist in bias will hardly be able to feel that the changes that produced toleration and the Augustan order were mere loss and decay, so the student most impressed by toleration, the advance of science and industrial skill and the triumph of reasonableness as human achievements will not be able to ignore the loss remarked on by Mr. Eliot and the loss entailed in a new separation between polite and popular culture. For the aim is certainly not that a ' lesson ' should be drawn from the Seventeenth Century. The aim is to produce a mind that will approach the problems of modern civilization with an understanding of their origins, a maturity of outlook, and, not a nostalgic addiction to the past, but a sense of human possibilities, difficult of achievement, that traditional cultures bear witness to and that it would be disastrous, in a breach of continuity, to lose sight of for good.

The non-specialist discipline involved in this evaluating of complex and widely comprehensive situations implies, if it is to be a real discipline, and every means must be taken to make it so, some local particularity and precision of knowledge (though not evenly spread over the whole field) and acquaintance with more in the way of particular disciplines than the literary-critical. Thus all students would give some close and sustained study to the causes and issues of the Civil War, whether or not they chose here the theme for one of their special ' pieces of work.' It is difficult to think of a better training than such a study might be in a due sense of the complexities of large political and social issues: no one should be able to carry away from it, and entertain in respect of modern problems, crudely simple notions of the relations between the economic and the moral, the self-interested and the ideal, the material and the spiritual in human affairs. Such a study would mean the acquisition of a good deal of special knowledge in various fields—knowledge, for instance, of the religious and theological background, and of economic and constitutional history. While everyone would read, for example, R. H. Tawney's *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (in itself a notable educational experience), those taking one of their major themes from the Civil War would, guided by qualified advice, follow up some of the leads given in the

notes at the end of the book. The point is that everyone would have been required to come to fairly close terms—the work must be thorough enough to justify that claim—with other fields of special study, other trained approaches and other disciplines, than the literary.

To offer another illustration: everyone, no doubt, would read Basil Willey's *Seventeenth Century Background;* but any student choosing to do one of his ' pieces of work ' on, say, Locke, would (under qualified philosophical guidance) carry his studies a good way outside and beyond that very useful book, which was designed for the literary student. (And a man who had worked on Locke would, of course, have worked on a good deal more than Locke). Similarly everyone would have used E. A. Burtt's *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Science* (if that were recommended by authority as a suitable book), but the student who chose one of his special themes from that field would have had to read a great deal more ambitiously and make acquaintance with representative work on the situation as it is to-day.

Perhaps enough now has been said in this inevitably sketchy way to suggest how it is proposed to tackle the problem of working out, in relation to modern conditions, a liberal education that, while aiming to promote something better than the calculating minimal acquisition of subsidiary odds and ends, shall avoid promoting industrious dissipation or the mere acquisition of unrelated patches of knowledge. The integrating principle is to be found in the defined scope of the field of study, English civilization in the Seventeenth Century; and its efficacy as an informing principle throughout the course is to be ensured by the student's preoccupation with the final evaluating work that he has before him. The bearing on, the need of reference to and from, the modern world is so essential and inescapable as to answer the purpose that suggested, in the Experimental College, the comparison between Athens and America.

Some critics will still insist that the proposed scheme cannot produce the properly trained man, the man properly trained in anything; that it might be said to aim explicitly at the production of the amateur. The reply must be: Call him what you will; we want to produce a mind that knows what precision and specialist knowledge are, is aware of the kinds not in its own possession that are necessary, has a maturity of outlook such as the study of history

ought to produce but even the general historian by profession doesn't always exhibit, and has been trained in a kind of thinking, a scrupulously sensitive yet enterprising use of intelligence, that is of its nature not specialized but cannot be expected without special training—a mind, energetic and resourceful, that will apply itself to the problems of civilization, and eagerly continue to improve its equipment and explore fresh approaches. The education proposed is necessarily full of incompletenesses and imperfections. It is a training in carrying on and going forward in spite of, and in recognition of, incompletenesses and imperfections—the only way in which the required kind of thinking (without which the specialist is frustrate) *can* be carried on. The student is to acquire as a discipline methods and habits that must inevitably be his in subsequent practice if he is to continue using his mind with effect and to the ends desired. The spirit of strict scholarship can be vicious, a mere obstructiveness, a deadness, and an excuse for pusillanimity. Standards, of course, must be maintained. The special discipline of an English School is the literary-critical, and in the field of this discipline such a school would have its function of maintaining standards. With the other studies the case would be different; the responsibility for standards must inevitably lie elsewhere. But that such work at the various extra-literary studies as could be expected in an English School must look oddly unsatisfactory from the relevant departmental points of view is no reason for being afraid to tackle seriously the problem of humane education, and leaving the departments to their largely self-stultifying self-sufficiency.

We should make our dispositions with an eye to producing neither the scholar nor the academic ' star ' (the ' high-flyer ')—the mind that shines at academic tests and examination gymnastic; but a mind equipped to carry on for itself; trained to work in the conditions in which it will have to work if it is to carry on at all; having sufficient knowledge, experience, self-reliance and staying-power for undertaking, and persisting in, sustained inquiries.

And this is the point at which to bring in a further proposal for a ' piece of work '; and that is that the student should have to write a paper (a limit of length being given) on the process of change by which the England of the Seventeenth Century turned into the England of to-day. In such a piece of work, clearly, it

would be pre-eminently the unacademic virtues[5] that would be demanded and tested: a pioneering spirit; the courage of enormous incompletenesses; the determination to complete the best possible chart with the inevitably patchy and sketchy knowledge that is all one's opportunities permit one to acquire; the judgment and intuition to select drastically yet delicately, and make a little go a long way; the ability to skip and to scamp with wisdom and conscience. There would be some relevant discussions, and the student would be able to consult advisers, and would be told what besides the books of the Hammonds he certainly must know of; but the work would be a test of his power of self-direction.

Since the stress falls for the moment on the prospecting and ranging mind, this seems the place to insert a note on the provision of stimulus to general 'extra-literary' reading. So much in his intellectual after-life may depend upon the start a man gets and the habits he forms at the university. And it is of the utmost importance that he should come on seminal and initiatory books that don't lie in his charted academic course. There should, then, be a specially accessible library containing (besides a great deal else) a number of copies of each of certain books, e.g., the best of Christopher Dawson, *Middletown*, and such works of sociology, anthropology, history, political thought, and so on, as might, after due consultation and consideration (and the library would be kept up-to-date), be picked on as appropriate. Some of them would be dealt with in discussion-group work. And some would be specified as likely to be referred to in the *viva* to be held at the end of the course. (The drawing-up and revision of the list would be a valuable experience for the seniors concerned).

The capacity for a definitive reading of a book is a necessary

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[5]The opposite of the qualities that would be fostered by study in the spirit of the following: 'The study of the classics had, and has, one quite peculiar value, in that it deals with an expression of human experience, which is once for all finished and unchangeable. All rules are definite and all exceptions established in the known literature. The result is that the mind acquires both a precision and flexibility which the study of no language or science which is still in the course of development can give.'—An ex-headmaster in *The Observer*. These are not the precision and the flexibility desired.

qualification, and here may come a proposal designed to foster it. The review requirement already referred to would be extended outside the strictly literary-critical. The student would be required to produce a review of some book (the choice to be approved by authority) bearing on his Seventeenth Century studies, and perhaps also of a book or two such as, though not directly related to an prescribed field, an educated man ought to be able to read, profit by and be articulate about.

It is time now to refer once again to the English Tripos as it now stands. In recognition of the sound principle that no one should be allowed to qualify for an Honours degree in the literature of his own language alone there is, obligatory for all candidates who have not studied another language than English in some other tripos, a paper in Part II called *French and Italian Set Books*. Candidates have merely to be prepared to translate passages from a number of specified texts—the list, it is true, is longish, and the student who prepares the whole will have done a good deal of miscellaneous and fragmentary reading. But no one who knows how in general practice the paper is prepared for, and how it is commonly regarded, will contend that it serves satisfactorily any respectable purpose. For it, then, would be substituted, to be undertaken by all candidates, firstly the study of Dante—a study designed to promote as good a knowledge and understanding of Dante as the conditions would allow.

This proposal has evoked the criticism that the conditions contemplated make it absurd: Dante is a large special study by himself. The argument, if admitted, would prove too much; we may as well abandon at once all thought of a humane education and the 'educated man,' and leave the multifarious specialists in 'humane' subjects to the functionless purity of their pure specialisms. Actually, Dante has not yet been formally jettisoned from our cultural heritage, and there is clearly no reason why the common assumption that educated people know something of him shouldn't, by work done in such a course as proposed, be honoured with a considerably more substantial grounding in actuality than it has. And there are obvious good reasons for making Dante a main study in such a course. It would involve, in a most effective kind of way, the study of a cultural order extremely different from that which has grown out of it—and which did grow out of it; and it

would provide for the contemplation of the modern scene a measuring reference, and, in so far as such can ever be attained, a standing place, outside. This purpose, by reason of the complete contrast combined with direct historical relation, and the pregnant compactness of the field, it serves better than the study of Athenian civilization (about which our student might be presumed to know a good deal) prescribed in the Experimental College could serve it. The exploitable value of the Dante study in relation to the Seventeenth Century was intimated when that century was described as being in touch with ' the world of Dante.'

There is no French Dante. But clearly there should be some provision for giving effect to what may be assumed to be the generally admitted principle that no one should be allowed an Honours degree in English who can't, or doesn't, read French freely and intelligently. The requirement to translate passages from specified texts certainly doesn't ensure this. Instead there would be the requirement to write during the course of studies, an essay that would entail sustained and intelligent reading in French. Students might, within limits, advice being to hand and authorization necessary, be allowed to choose their subjects. A man might, for instance, write on that line from Baudelaire which has become of special interest to the English reader of poetry since Mr. Eliot arrived. He couldn't, of course, write his essay without having read a great deal in French outside his main focus. And the man who, having done such a piece of work, shouldn't have got a start that would carry him on in a subsequent year-by-year improvement of his acquaintance with French literature certainly wouldn't have got it from work for the ordinary kind of academic test.

It may be well before closing to give a summary of the scheme rather like that which might appear in a *Student's Handbook*:

(1) Practical Criticism: a number of papers, to be taken at the end of the course. These are to provide the test of literary education and critical competence.

(2) The Seventeenth Century in England: four or five ' pieces of work,' on subjects chosen according to the principles explained, to be done during the course.

(3) An essay, to be written during the course, on the process of change by which England of the Seventeenth Century turned into the England of to-day.

(4) Dante, a general study: a paper, or papers, to be taken at the end of the course.

(5) A subject from French literature or literary history: a substantial essay, to be written during the course.

(6) Reviews, to be written during the course, of a number of books which are to be chosen in consultation with authority.

(7) A *viva voce* examination to be held at the end of the course.

N.B.—Participation required in organized discussion—and seminar-work.

This then, offered in the spirit indicated, is an answer to the common interrogative form of acquiescence in adverse comment on the present system: 'Yes, it's very unsatisfactory, we all know that; but what would you put in its place?' A practical kind of answer? Yes, in the sense that, if an experiment on these lines were authorized and facilities were provided (as they *could* be), and those running it believed in it energetically, it could certainly be made successful. Is the existing system practical? one might ask. At any rate. what it amounts to in practice bears a pitifully remote relation to what it formally pretends to be.

The proposed scheme will, no doubt, in spite of the professed intention and spirit, be called Utopian. Yet that reforms are badly needed is commonly realized both by students and their seniors, and it is difficult to see how, except on some such lines, there can be any real reform. The attempted combination of different subjects in the manner discussed by Mr. E. W. F. Tomlin in his *Scrutiny of Modern Greats*[5]—subjects to be studied and examined on in the usual academic way—will not in practice produce anything like the comprehensive and balanced education intended. And the *Ersatz* discipline (or grind)—Anglo-Saxon, Latin, Semasiological or what—that is so widely favoured by the academic mind as a way of introducing a stiffening reality into the literary curriculum can only make things worse.

The concluding emphasis may fitly fall once more on the Idea of a University. The profit of experiment on the suggested lines is, as has already been insisted, not to be thought of merely in terms

[5]See *Scrutiny*, Vol. IV, No. 4.

of a student-product to be turned out. The work of running the School, with the contacts and collaborations it would involve, would produce a focal centre in which the Idea of a University would be present and alive as it nowhere is now. The profit wouldn't be merely within the School of English; anyone thinking to compute it would have to look, not merely outside that School, but outside the business of humane education.

F. R. Leavis.

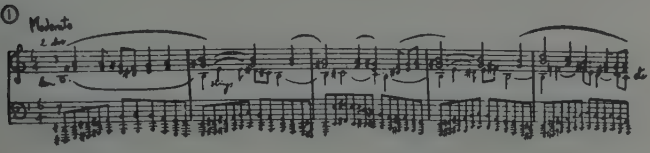
RUBBRA'S No. 3

BY the term ' symphony ' one generally means, to phrase the definition in its most cautious form, a fairly extended orchestral composition which, since the nineteenth century at least, tends to be of a more or less serious nature. The symphony would hardly seem to be a music-form typical of the present: for one thing, this is not a time at which many composers have the staying-power necessary for the creation of a work of imposing dimensions; and, inseparable from this, there is the technical difficulty that the classical symphony was pre-eminently the product of diatonicism and that a tonal system so deliberate and so clearly defined is no longer applicable to an age of perplexity and disintegration.

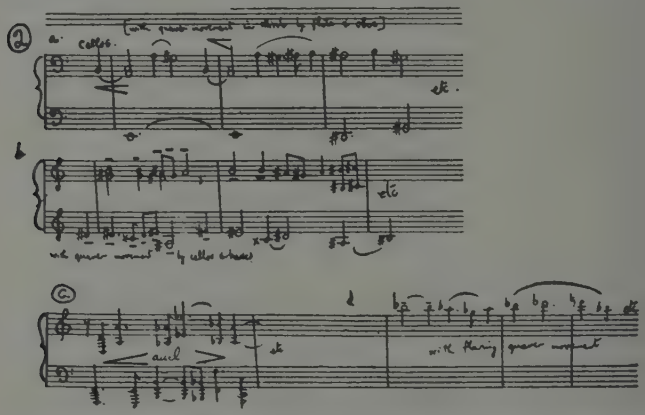
But when, in *Scrutiny* for June, 1939, I wrote about Edmund Rubbra's music in general terms, I suggested that, at a long view, his importance would probably consist mostly in that he was courageous enough to conceive and execute works of considerable scope by modifying the diatonic homophony of the classical symphony in such a way as to reconcile it with a predominantly lyrical, vocally conceived utterance and with a modal and rhythmic freedom similar to that which characterises the music of the sixteenth century. The climaxes in his symphonies, as in his other music, are therefore the result of true musical (polyphonic) thinking, not merely crescendos of excitement as in many intermittently admirable works such as the symphonies of Vaughan Williams and Walton. It is true that a ' polyphonic ' conception of the modern orchestra might be too much for the human ear if an independent melodic life was

enjoyed by each instrument; but Rubbra offsets this difficulty with the organic unity which he achieves by employing throughout his movements a peculiar technique (which is of course more than a device and perhaps the most distinguishing mark of his sensibility) both of melodic generation and dissection. In my earlier article I described at some length how the ' contrapuntal evolution of his lyrical themes is played off against the insistent building-up, in a manner that is cumulative and dynamic in effect, of linear formulae which are derived from characteristic aspects or features of these themes '; and I further suggested that the problem of reconciling the musical logic with what I called the nervous impression, hadn't in either of Rubbra's first two symphonies, extremely serious and important compositions though they are, been completely solved.

To my mind, this solution is achieved in the Symphony No. 3, which is being given its first performance at Queen's Hall on September 28. It is a big work, of considerable nobility; but it has the utmost lucidity—in a sense simplicity—of texture. It is significant that although the tonal transitions are very subtle and plastic, being vocally conceived, the tonal feeling of the work is more diatonic than in either of the previous symphonies. But it is a diatonicism refreshed and recreated, in no sense an idiom effete or outmoded. This re-creation, and the closely wrought unity of the composition as a whole, is the measure of Rubbra's integrity.

The first movement is in a modified version—without the usual key-relationships—of conventional sonata form. The first subject, announced without preliminaries, is a spacious, beautifully singable melody in an E majorish tonality, presented first by two oboes in thirds, with a flowing counterpoint on the strings, and accompanied by a surging bass in quaver movement.

As the music swirls, rather than modulates, through G sharp minor, D sharp minor, E flat minor and B flat minor the following subsidiary themes and phrases, all to become of great structural

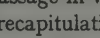
importance, as it were spring as living organisms, each one from that preceding:



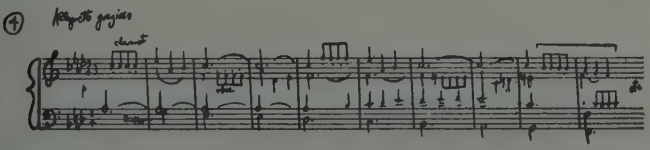
Then follows a short homophonic bridge passage, mainly a duologue between two groups of wind instruments which, juxtaposing primary triads with the most lucid delicacy, emphasize by contrast the gradually increasing momentum of the music's suavely flowing parts. The first-subject section concludes with a big climax built mainly on 2b and 2c, and employing much contrapuntal ingenuity. A motif from the bass of the first bars of the symphony—a note rising semitonally and then falling again—here establishes itself on horns and trumpets as a kind of motto for the movement and the work as a whole.

Lyrical and swaying, derived remotely from the bass of the opening bars so that it is at one and the same time contrast and natural evolution, the second subject enters immediately sung by flutes and bassoons with a pizzicato strings accompaniment over a pedal D:

Without establishing a key-centre the fluctuating basses eventually soar, by way of a reminiscence of 2c, into another homophonic passage during which the brass agilely insists on a characteristic

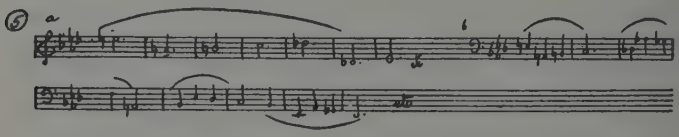
rhythm  which gradually intensifies through a steady six-four pulse and a series of kaleidoscopic tonal transitions, beginning in a kind of C sharp minor with flattened leading-note. The whole of this development section is an elaborate example of Rubbra's method of melodic dissection. A lilting three-two melody, evolved from the swing of the second subject and from the rhythm of the homophonic passage, is poised over the rising semitonal figure (six-four) of 2b, a version in duple rhythm grows above an extended viola trill on B flat, muted horns and trumpets interject vigorous snatches of counterpoint into the orchestral fabric until, after a tremendous climax for full orchestra based on the characteristic rhythm and on fragments of 1, the second subject is restated, this time in an E flat minorish tonality. The rhythmic motif persists through a bridge passage in which the pace gradually slackens, and then leads into the recapitulation, which is brief and does not involve the second subject at all. As the recapitulation proceeds the tonality manifests a curious ambivalence between E major and G major and the rising-falling semitonal motif of the opening bars is explicitly insisted on. A climax based on 2b, and a reminiscence of the original homophonic passage flow into an exquisite elegiac coda, beginning as an oboe solo above a pedal B in dotted rhythm on the horns. This piteous fragmentary melody is an emotional synthesis of the lyrical material of the movement. The anguish is finally stilled by a clear E major statement (*adagio tranquillo*) of the opening phrase. From first to last the dynamic impetus of the movement never flags; the rise and fall, and eventual stilling, of momentum is a manifestation of superb musical and emotional logic.

At the beginning of the Scherzo the rhythm which has dominated the first movement since the enunciation of the development section, acquires, turned back to front, an amiable almost pastoral character.

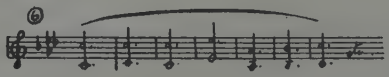


The texture is very contrapuntal and the key transitions elliptical

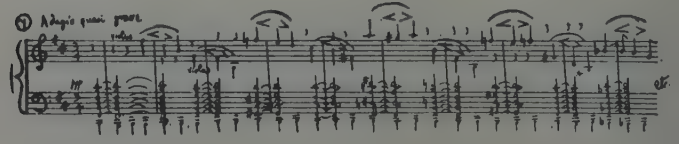
and surprising, chiefly because the harmonic basis is defined by the counterpoint. A certain austerity, even hollowness, in the part-writing is emphasized by the orchestration which maintains an independent function to brass, woodwind and strings. The melodic material is built almost entirely out of the opening phrases, the following variants on it, usually in tonalities strangely remote from the initial A flat major:

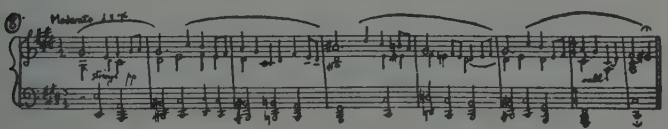


and this triply augmented form sung by violins accompanied by clarinet and bassoon playing in two-part counterpoint a suave version of the motif of the first movement.



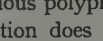
This first-movement motif has an increasingly important function as the music gathers intensity and the tonalities become more and more distraught. Strange and whirling figures arise from the single seed of the innocent opening theme, but through all the tumult a tympani pedal on G provide anchorage until the movement concludes with a sudden return to the A flat tonality and a bold statement of the characteristic rhythm and rising third by trumpets and trombones.

The slow movement begins with an exquisitely poised dialogue between violins and violas, accompanied by muffled chords on horns and trombones (the re-appearance of the semitonal motif inverted should be noticed):

The preponderance of poignant seconds and major sevenths is balanced by the serene stability of the drooping minor triads, so that, even when the dialogue assumes a syncopated form, the mood remains for all its tension, dignified, classical, grave. Soon the strings add a counterpoint in quaver movement, which is taken up by the woodwind, while the 'cellos and basses insinuate an ominous triplet figure. With the strings introducing a new solemn melody in common time and the tonality shifting through B flat minor, the texture becomes elaborate and concentrated until the whole orchestra is involved in a contrapuntal dissection of the material so far employed, horns and trumpets in particular developing the anguished semitonal motif. At the climax conflicting rhythms and dissonant entries produce an effect of rigorously controlled passion by means that are almost polymodal. Basses and trombones, playing a syncopated version of the original drooping phrase, gradually resolve on to a D major-like tonality and the strings sing a sustained beautifully moulded version of the second subject over a stately four-four pulse in crochets (bass strings) and quavers (horns and bassoons). Within the tranquillity of this conclusion is a dynamic pulse which is the consummation of the movement's course. At the very end, above a sustained D major triad, the first two bars of the opening dialogue are restated with an uncannily moving simplicity. This restatement over the major chord, as opposed to the B minor of the beginning, as it were symbolises the resolution of conflict which makes this movement one of the few authentic examples of twentieth-century tragic art.

The theme of the variations which form the fourth movement must be quoted complete.

It is a melody of lyrical tenderness, essentially vocal in conception. Except for a slight ambivalence between E major and the major of the relative minor (C sharp), and for a certain Dowland-like plasticity in the rhythmic build, the tune is straightforwardly diatonic and without any of the symptoms

of modernity. Yet it is utterly unique and unlike anything else in the history of music. The emphasis on the absolute and perfect consonances of the fifth and fourth in the structure of the theme, its rhythmic freedom, and the sudden elevation to the major sixth with its implication of C sharp, help to give the melody its peculiar freshness and radiance; but its distinctive quality, its uniqueness, defy tabulation. Whatever its secret, it is a theme as remarkable for its potentialities as for its intrinsic beauty.

Rubbra's conception of the variation form is related to his conception of the symphony as a whole and the effect of the variations, always tending towards the concluding fugue, is cumulative. At the same time, since there is an implicit recognition that each variation ' deals with ' some specific aspect of the theme, his usual method of continuous polyphonic generation and dissection in structure and orchestration does not here apply, so that there is scope for a more conventionally ' atmospheric ' treatment of the orchestra. Usually Rubbra's orchestration is designed mainly to give varying shades of definition to the polyphony; but in this movement, particularly in variations 1, 2, 3, and 6, effects of tone-colour and timbre are used with beautiful ingenuity *as such* in the presentation of this or that aspect of the theme.

Variation I (six-eight,  of theme) is based on the characteristic leap of a sixth which has already been referred to. Clarinets and strings play variants of this aspect of the theme in an oddly fluctuating tonality, accompanied by breathless staccato chords, making piquant use of sevenths, on horns, 'cellos and basses.

Variation 2. Violins and violas sing a simple version of the theme in three-four, with a soaring counterpoint of flutes and oboes, over a steady rhythmic pulse of tympani and pizzicato basses. Fragments of the theme are developed imitatively by the strings while horns and later trumpets and trombones intensify a characteristic rhythm. The tonality finally settles to a kind of D minor, with an Aeolian tendency.

Variation 3. *Allegretto leggiero.* This is chiefly in G major, the theme being indicated in delicately syncopated rhythm by trumpets and trombones, with interwoven counterpoints, gracefully skittish in six-eight, by woodwind and strings. The tympani have an important independent part.

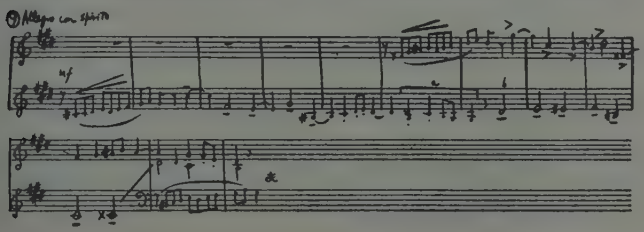
Variation 4. Three-two, in B flat major-minor. The theme, at its original speed, but inverted, is here played by strings alone, in canon at the octave, accompanied by the original counterpoint also inverted. At bar 8 the theme appears the right way up and is also canonically imitated.

Variation 5. Three-four, *allegretto scherzando,* over an unremitting tympani pedal on F sharp. The woodwind, in a playful dotted rhythm, dissect fragments of the last phrases of the theme, particularly the tierce de picardie cadence. Intermittently flutes and strings add a flowing crotchet counterpoint.

Variation 6. This is a development in five-four from the conclusion of the preceding variation. The tonality wavers mysteriously between A flat minor, E flat minor, and E minor as trombones, horns and trumpets ejaculate a jerky dotted rhythm (*allegro energico*) over a gawky pizzicato bass built on the opening phrase of the bass of the original theme. The hollowness of the scoring intensifies the sinister effect.

Variation 7. *Adagio* in four-four, with very free tonality centering round E major. This is an extremely simple development (at first for strings alone) of the harmonic feeling of the theme, reintroducing the rising-falling semitonal motif which has appeared conspicuously in the other movements. Mainly composed of diatonic concords flexibly related, the variation is repeated by violas and trombones, while the flutes and violins sing the original theme in a suave triplet rhythm above. The two opposing rhythms, and the melting key-sense, produce a characteristic impression of alertness, poised precariousness, within the tranquillity. As the bass droops chromatically, the pulse relaxes, a plagal cadence establishes a C sharp major triad, and the final fugue (*allegro con spirito*) abruptly enters.

The bouncy and elaborately syncopated subject of the fugue, with its main countersubject ' b ' (in minims) must be quoted:



Although this subject is not directly derived from the theme of the variations we may note that the intervals of fifth and sixth occupy a structurally important position in both, and that the upward scurrying figure with which the subject opens rounds itself off in the by now familiar rising-falling semitonal phrase. This motif soon appears episodically, both in its original form twice augmented, and in inversion.

The fugue, which is in three and occasionally four parts, develops rapidly through G sharp minor, D sharp minor to B flat minor when a chromatic bass in minims (related to the counter-subject) asserts itself and leads into a little episode, orchestrated for flutes, violins and bassoon, based on the tail (a) of the subject with inversion in slightly elaborated rhythm. A series of irregular and modified stretti chase each other as far as a brusque arrest of the movement on the dominant of C sharp: subject and countersubjects start off again very softly over a staccato bassoon presentation of the semitonal phrase in crotchets until, with the rhythmic pulse accumulating energy and the tonal transitions growing bewilderingly elliptical, the motif, augmented once more to minims and often inverted, becomes welded into a descending figure derived from an inversion of the countersubject.

Above this falling phrase as bass, and above the fugue subject proper interlinked with a version amalgamating the staccato bassoon figure, the trumpets and first violins chant fortissimo the theme of the variations in its original form, its one-time tenderness now challenging and bold. As its last phrase enters in canon, a final reference to the semitonal motif inverted resolves on to a prolonged drum-roll on G sharp and then, beneath the suspended F sharp of the concluding tierce de picardie, trombones, violas, and horns emphaticially sing the ascending quaver figure of the beginning of the fugue. This heroic apotheosis consummates not only the material of the fugue itself and of the variations, but the emotional temper of the symphony as a whole.

What makes for ' organic ' unity in a composition or in any work of art can never be explained since it is one of the mysteries of creation: but I should perhaps add, for fear of misunderstanding, that none of the correspondences between movements which I have referred to in these pages is to be regarded as intentionally devised; they are merely a few of the more obvious symbols of an inner

emotional unity. A similar caveat is necessary with reference to a peculiar feature of the key-sense of the symphony. Although, as we have seen, the tonal feeling is extremely plastic and subtle, we may say that the first movement begins and ends fairly patently in E major, that the Scherzo begins and ends in A flat (or G sharp) major, that the slow movement has a tendency towards B minor and that the theme of the variations is, if a little ambiguously, in E. Thus the keys of the four movements make up the tones of the primary triad of E major, a fact which suggests how closely Rubbra's idiom is rooted in the fundamental consonances and the 'vocal' aspects of melody, just as the remarkable fugue, while being completely original and without precedent, is an extension of the diatonicism of J. S. Bach.

This much is certain: there are not more than a handful of works composed in the twentieth century that can be put beside Rubbra's Third as examples of sustained musical thinking on anything like a comparable scale. The case of the Walton and Vaughan Williams symphonies, referred to at the beginning of this essay, is merely symptomatic, for apart from Sibelius, some of van Dieren and Bartók, Busoni's *Fantasia Contrappuntistica,* and a few composers (such as Janácêk) with esoteric, or (such as the Schönbergians) with artificial solutions, the tale is always the same: musical thinking, if attempted on an extended scale, collapses into rhetoric (*cf.* Bloch) and however fiercely the music protests it remains in essence static. It has movement in plenty, but no dynamic growth, for it is the cry of the soul imprisoned. A number of very fine composers—for instance, in many of their works Bartók and Roussel—seem to me deficient in true musical thinking, for an ability to create long melodic lines, though it is perhaps the basis of musical thinking, is not the whole of it. If there is one reason more than another why I think Rubbra's development is going to be of the utmost importance in the history of music it is because he has, to a greater extent, probably, than any composer now creating, this ability to reason consistently in musical terms. Such continuity of musical logic manifests itself not only through each separate movement but through each symphonic whole; not only through each completed symphony but through the succession of emotional and intellectual experiences that the symphonies represent. The increasing technical and emotional

maturity of the first two symphonies leads to the perfect realization of the Third; from this realization the Symphony No. 4, the first movement of which is at present in process of creation, will evolve a new orientation.

It may be a corollary of the fact that the Third Symphony is a work of true symphonic breadth that it also manifests a peculiar and deceptive simplicity. Technically, of course, it is consummately ingenious; yet its emotional tenor is passionate and direct with a lyricism—full-blooded and flowing but always distinguished and aristocratically poised—such as we had thought contemporary music might never recover. Because it is more direct than the complex Second Symphony we must not assume that it is less ' profound '; rather is its simplicity the result of still greater emotional coherence, with a beautiful translucence in its minutest detail. Nor do I think one can say it is less profound than such unquestionably ' difficult ' masterpieces of our time as van Dieren's *Spenser Sonnet* or Berg's *Lyric Suite*, for it speaks with a different accent, the recreated breath of the great classical tradition. The anger and bitterness which seemed to condition the tough pride of the first two symphonies here give place to a positive vigour, a lucidity of thought and feeling, which is to be reached only through passion and sweat, discipline and hard work. And although we are too close for a final judgment, and although, remembering (for instance) the late works of Fauré, the Fourth Symphony of Sibelius and, in a different way, Mahler's No. 9, the claim may seem extravagant, I can understand what a friend—a critic and teacher of music—meant when, after listening to the performance of a piano reduction of Rubbra's Third he exclaimed: ' Why, it's the biggest thing since Brahms.' If Yeats was right when he said ' We want, not a new technique, but the old passion felt as new,' we have the answer in this symphony. The old heroic note calls reborn through the trumpet melody of the conclusion, but it calls, not to the past, but to the future. At a time such as the present, when civilization totters, the work is thus more than a consolation, it is a challenge too.

W. H. Mellers.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MANZONI'S 'PROMESSI SPOSI'

IN few writers is the correspondence between personal and literary development so close as in Manzoni. His works are few in number—a handful of poems, two experimental tragedies, and one great novel—but they are backed by a considerable body of criticism and a continuous study of the implications of his literary activity. This probing into the nature and conditions of his art derives from historical and personal circumstances. The view of art which he inherited from the eighteenth century and to which, from the first, he devoted himself, was essentially moral in its foundation and civilising in its purpose. Its root was faith in a beneficent social stability based on a generally accepted moral outlook. This faith was substantially that of the great Italian satirist Giuseppe Parini, who had been tutor to Carlo Imbonati, the lover of Manzoni's mother, and whose poetry was greatly admired by that Parisian circle of ' enlightened ' Italians in which Manzoni was brought up. Parini's poetry turned upon the necessary relationship between the ' useful ' and the ' good.' The nature of ' il buono ' had been, for Parini, evident, a certainty shared by all the worthy elements of society and derived from a consensus of disinterested opinion; the satirist's purpose was to judge humanity in the light of this certainty and to teach that the ' useful ' could be attained infallibly only through devotion to the good.

But Manzoni's art, closely related as it is in spirit and aim to eighteenth century enlightenment, was unable to share these assumptions. Parini had assumed an accepted order of society in which every right presupposed a duty and in which the idea of liberty was subordinate to that of devotion to ' il buono.' Manzoni, the formative years of whose life were passed in a Paris that had experienced the French Revolution and in social circles permeated by the sceptical philosophy of the *salons*, was inevitably driven to explore the basis of his ideals. This exploration assumed a double aspect. The foundations of individual morality, which Parini had regarded as self-evident in his conception of ' il buono,' needed to

be examined and consciously defined; and the 'social' ideal of 'justice,' by which the relations of society were regulated in accordance with the universally accepted 'good,' had to be related to the new conviction that progress could only be attained by wholesale revolution. Manzoni's work, in short, is an attempt to safeguard his deepest interests and to give full artistic expression to his search for moral coherence in a world of uncertainties.

The uncertainty which underlies the *Promessi Sposi* is already implicit in the movement of Manzoni's prose. His account of the despair which Gertrude feels when she realizes herself destined against her will to become a nun is not less typical than the sermon in which Cardinal Borromeo expounds the nature and action of Grace to the newly-converted Innominato. The two passages are worth setting side by side because they show how closely related in Manzoni are despair and consolation:

> 'In tutto il resto di quella giornata, Gertrude non ebbe un minuto di bene. Avrebbe desiderato riposar l'animo da tante commozioni, lasciar, per dir cosi, chiarire i suoi pensieri, render conto a sé stessa di ciò che aveva fatto, di ciò che le rimaneva da fare, sapere ciò che volesse, rallentare un momento quella macchina che, appena avviata, andava così precipitosamente; ma non ci fu verso.' (Ch. X).
>
> 'Non ve lo sentite in cuore che v'opprime, che v'agita, che non vi lascia stare, e nello stesso tempo v'attira, vi fa presentire una speranza di quiete, di consolazione, d'una consolazione che sarà piena, immensa, subito che voi lo riconosciate, lo confessiate, l'imploriate.' (Ch. XXIII).[1]

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[1] 'For all the rest of that day, Gertrude did not have a single moment of well-being. She would have liked to give her mind rest from so many commctions, to allow her thoughts to be clarified, so to speak, to become conscious of what she had done, of what remained to do, to know what she wanted, to restrain for a moment the machine which, once set in motion, moved so precipitously; but there was no means of doing this.'

'Do you not feel Him in your heart, constraining, disturbing you, refusing to leave you, and at the same time attracting you, making you feel a hope of peace, of consolation: of a consolation

The feature common to these two passages, directly opposed as they are in intention, is the *dynamic* nature (so to call it) of their development. The words of which they are formed are not self-sufficient, independent in their effect; each word rather bears, as though implicit within itself, the seed of another which carries the sentiment a step further towards its goal. Gertrude desires no more than a single 'momento di bene,' and this, significantly enough, is the only phrase in the whole passage which is allowed to stand by itself without development or modification. But the logic of the sentence, as it takes form in the multiplication of the verbs, moves irresistibly away from this fixed desire to arrive finally at that picture of the machine relentlessly, 'precipitously' in motion; and the mention of the machine emphasizes both the impersonality and the inevitability of the whole process, before which 'rallentare' serves only to bring out the futility of the victim's efforts to avoid what has now become her destiny. So also with the Cardinal's sermon. The action of God is represented as a vigorous and cumulative force 'che v'opprime, che v'agita, che non vi lascia stare'; and the very 'speranza di quiete' which is presented as the goal of all this activity is reinforced by 'consolazione,' which is then repeated and expanded into 'piena, immensa.'

The implications of this prose are extremely important. Where a 'classical' writer—by which I mean a writer firmly established in an artistic tradition and fully conscious of unquestioned moral standards—seems to stand outside the experience he is describing and to convey something already clearly defined in his own mind, Manzoni is concerned to represent the actual birth of this state and to reproduce the very process of its development. The traditional distinction between the finished thought and its gradual unfolding in the mind is replaced by a new sense of the identity between the process and the completed product; and this revolution is accompanied, in the philosophical sphere with which Manzoni was most deeply concerned, by an even more exclusive insistence upon God's immanence in the process of development. This characteristic has a profound effect upon Manzoni's handling of the novel. His characters are not conceived, so to speak, *from outside* and described

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which shall be full, immense, as soon as you recognize it, confess it, implore it.'

with classic detachment, the finished picture preceding and dominating the separate impressions in the mind of the novelist; rather the separate impressions, the actions of the man himself and the details of his environment, come gradually together to form a complete portrait. The timid priest Don Abbondio, for example, is introduced at the very beginning of the book without preliminary description; his character is subtly and, as it were, insensibly built up out of his successive actions. He appears walking ' tranquilly ' along a country road, saying his Office, and stopping occasionally to lift his head with a certain air of complacent distraction (' *girati oziosamente gli occhi all'intorno* '[2]) or to kick idly at the pebbles on his path. In this way, Manzoni introduces his character directly into the developing stream of events, and introduces a vast mass of significant detail without standing aside even for a moment from the development of his history. This sense of the absolute continuity between exterior events and the human characters moulded by them, besides striking a distinctively ' modern ' note, is a decisive condition of Manzoni's genius.

In this matter Manzoni is the child of his age. What is striking and individual in him is the fact that he felt most acutely the incompatibility between these new developments and the stable, ' classical ' basis of his own moral and social instincts. In the *Promessi Sposi* we are aware, not only of a world in continual motion, perpetually directed by its own internal logic towards destruction, but also of the desire for something, such as that ' consolation ' or that ' moment of well-being,' which will provide a firm basis against the threatened confusion. Manzoni is concerned, throughout his novel, with the threat of anarchy; personal anarchy due to the absence of objective sanctions for his moral instincts, and social anarchy proceeding from the lack of any rational check to destructive self-interest. Manzoni felt that the alternative to a firmly established moral consciousness, guaranteeing the possibility and validity of man's choice between good and evil, was a pitiless determinism—the determinism reflected in the very movement of his prose. Again this threat, he sets the faith in an objective revelation which he had gained from his ' conversion ' to Catholicism. The *Promessi Sposi* turns upon this relationship between an

[2] ' Having let his eyes wander lazily.'

objective faith and a world threatened by the consequences of irresponsibility leading to meaningless determinism; it is this fact, more than any other, which makes it so much more than simply 'another historical novel.'

Since each of these alternatives—religion and anarchy—remained throughout his life equally real to Manzoni, it is natural that his conversion appears in the novel as something still in the process of development. The actual moment of acceptance, which had taken place many years before, had been rather a recognition of the need for submission than an achievement of personal coherence. It gave him the conviction he later described in a letter to the Contessa Saluzzo: 'It is true that the evidences of the Catholic religion fill and dominate my intellect; I see it at the beginning and end of all moral questions, whenever it is invoked and whenever it is excluded.' In his two plays and in his great novel, Manzoni applies this conviction to the whole field of his experience, seeking to find a place and significance for every part of it in the light of the truth he had discovered; so that the *Promessi Sposi* presents a world in continuous and restless motion round a fixed point, which is the Christian revelation. This fixed point is personified by Manzoni in the shape of the only character who is independent of the vicissitudes of the story. The other figures of the book are transformed, in accordance with the conditions imposed by their original dispositions, by the events to which they are exposed; they *develop*, either towards a standard of perfection or away from it. With Cardinal Federigo Borromeo this is not so. The close relationship between the character of Federigo and Manzoni's own problems, as I have stated them, is clear from the first description of him:

> 'He attended, as I say, to those words and those maxims, took them seriously, tried them out, and found them *true*, he saw, therefore, that there could not be *truth* in other words and other maxims of opposite sense, which are also transmitted from generation to generation, with equal security and sometimes from the same lips; and he proposed to take as standard of his actions and thoughts those which were *true* . . . Persuaded that life is not intended to be a burden for the many and a feast for the few, but rather an obligation for all . . . he began to consider from

childhood how he might render his own life *useful and holy.*' (Ch. XXII).

This account of the Cardinal might be a summary of the development of Manzoni's own thought. Like Manzoni, Federigo understood the necessity of ordering his life in accordance with a determined standard of duty. But—and this is the crucial point—the conflicting maxims of the various moral systems propose themselves to man ' with equal security, and sometimes from the same lips,' so that the individual, in the absence of an absolute sanction for his moral instincts, is inevitably exposed to uncertainty and contradiction. The significance of Cardinal Borromeo lay in the fact that he had found a *true* religion (' he found them *true* '—' those which were *true* '—the word is of fundamental importance in all Manzoni's writings) and had adopted it as the norm of his thoughts and actions. Manzoni's approach to ethics is characterized by the very logic which had impelled him towards scepticism. He had already noted in his prose tract on *La Morale Cattolica* that the defect of all ' natural ' systems of morality lay in their inability to avoid ' the shame of giving precepts and advice without being able to propose adequate motives.' The Cardinal had overcome this difficulty by discovering and accepting from the first the correspondence between a true religion and a morality that was ' useful and holy.' In that word ' useful ' we may discern a connection, still alive in Manzoni, with the morality sponsored by Parini; and Borromeo, who understood so clearly the necessary relationship between that morality and a supernatural faith, becomes the corner-stone of the *Promessi Sposi.*

Manzoni spares no pains to emphasize the distinctive position of his Cardinal. Federigo enters the novel as a man already formed. It is not an accident that he had accepted his vocation ' from childhood ' where those around him only reached consciousness of theirs after years of effort; and it is not by chance that his habitual tone is that of the preacher who knows himself to be the mouthpiece of God. He appears for the first time, moreover, at the turning-point of the whole novel, and, having exercised his decisive influence upon the conversion of the Innominato and upon the events immediately arising from it, he does not appear in person again. This does not mean, of course, that Manzoni himself

lives in his novel only in the character of Federigo. Manzoni, unlike the Cardinal, had not reached his religious convictions 'from childhood.' On the contrary, the *Promessi Sposi* reflects a moral and religious consciousness still in process of development, still occupied with reconciling transcendant truth to the various degrees of human resolution represented by the various characters of his book. The central incident of the whole novel is the encounter between Borromeo and the Innominato, between the upholder of the Catholic certainties and the most arbitrary of feudal tyrants. In relation to that encounter, the various threads of the story fall into place, either as leading up to it or as proceeding logically from it. Renzo and Lucia, the betrothed peasants, fall victims to the whim of Don Rodrigo, in a world where the weak have no protection against the selfish caprice of their supporters; and Don Rodrigo, foiled in his design against Lucia by the foresight of Fra Cristoforo, calls upon the Innominato to help him. The kidnapping of Lucia which follows, and the night passed by her alone in the tyrant's castle, are at once the climax and the turning-point of her misfortunes; they lead up to the conversion of the Innominato and his meeting with the Cardinal. At this meeting, the Christian position is explicitly and authoritatively defined; in the second half of the book, which leads through the disaster of the plague to the final marriage of Renzo and Lucia, it is constantly present and serves as a key to the significance of the events described. Within this framework, and always with reference to the certainties proclaimed by Federigo, takes place the drama of the submission of free will to the truth.

The submission of free will to the truth—but the real subject of the *Promessi Sposi* is the very possibility of freedom of choice. Manzoni's concern with freedom stands in the closest relation to the spiritual crisis of nineteenth-century Romanticism. There are moments when Manzoni recalls Dostoievsky's analysis of the consequences of absolute egoism. The problem of the will, as it presented itself to him, is briefly this: the corrosive effect of eighteenth-century rationalism upon accepted moral and spiritual traditions gave rise to a conception of the will as not only free, according to the Christian conception of free will, but as *autonomous*, operating independently of all moral or social checks. So we have the murderer in *Crime and Punishment* who killed an

old woman because he wanted to have ' the daring,' ' wanted to be a Napoleon,' and later we have the conspirators in *The Possessed* whose activity consisted in the feverish construction of vast plots *in vacancy*. In vacancy: that is the essential point. Never had the act of choice been so insisted upon as the chief indication of the significance of human action: never had there been such an absence of motive for choosing. Without the spiritual sanctions which had served as conditions for the exercise of the human will, the simple capacity to act remained without further significance. The good action and the bad were identical in value, and both ended equally in death, so that Kirillov, in Dostoievsky's story, was led to suicide by his very desire ' to prove my independence and my new terrible freedom.' Manzoni's education and his profoundly moral and civil instincts saved him from this anarchy; but a similar concern with the exercise of the will underlies his submission to a religious philosophy.

Manzoni indicated the nature of this submission in his creation of Lucia. Arguing logically from his insistence on the supreme importance of the act of the will in giving significance to human life, he wrote in 1820 to his spiritual adviser Canon Tosi that the Church ' with her first teaching can raise the simple soul, unaware even of the existence of a moral philosophy, to the highest point . . . of morality itself.' This statement is in no sense sentimental, but a strictly logical deduction from Manzoni's convictions. If the end of the will lies in submission to the *truth*, without which the will itself remains objectless and therefore empty, it follows that any soul which has arrived at this end has fulfilled the condition of its existence: so that Lucia possesses from the first the wisdom which the remaining characters of the *Promessi Sposi* have to acquire, if at all, through the laborious conquest of moral insight. The decisive moment in Lucia's career is the night passed by her alone as the prisoner of the Innominato. During that night she gives up all hope of marrying Renzo by vowing her chastity, if she escapes, to the Virgin Mary; and from this central moment, in which Manzoni's idea of submission triumphs, follows the conversion of the Innominato and the final slow resolution of the story.

It cannot be said that Lucia is one of Manzoni's most satisfactory characters. She is essential to the novel, whose scheme demands a representation of the ideal of total submission; but she

remains, on the whole, a symbol rather than a person. This 'unreality' corresponds to a certain element of constraint in the whole book. The occasion of the Innominato's conversion—he is decisively affected by Lucia's sanctity—is scarcely convincing. though the process of thought which leads up to it is, as we shall see, profoundly interesting. There is some truth in the judgment that the plot of the *Promessi Sposi* is artificial, even 'moralizing'; but it is essential to realize that a deeply individual experience is being compressed, so to speak, into a set mould, whose nature is dictated by Manzoni's determination to submit absolutely to an external standard of truth. That is a condition of Manzoni's genius: not the spontaneous creation of a world, but the setting of a varied experience against a rigid and pre-determined framework to which it must conform. Sometimes the experience overflows the limits of the mould, and issues in that peculiar irony of which Manzoni is a master and of which Don Abbondio is supremely the spokesman. The greatness of the novel lies in this fruitful tension between the rigid form of the plot and the life which circulates within it. The remaining characters of the book have more life than Lucia because we feel in them the gap between ideal and fact. To create a convincing character on the lines of Lucia, Manzoni would have had to identify himself spontaneously with his ideal, much as the biographer of a mediæval saint did so; and, in doing this, he would have ceased to be a modern man.

In Renzo, Lucia's lover, we have the first stage in Manzoni's analysis of the rebellious will. Born, like Lucia, a peasant, and deeply attached to his native soil, Renzo is by disposition one of those who accept the divine law as self-evident, as the basis of a productive and simple life crowned in the Sacrament of marriage. But this desire for natural happiness is not, in Manzoni's view, always enough. When obstructed by the arbitrary designs of Don Rodrigo against Lucia, Renzo determines to take justice into his own hands: 'la farò *io* la giustizia.' At this point, Manzoni's analysis of the individual will merges into his study of the foundations of society. Society must be based on a conception of justice which guarantees the rights of the individual and checks the destructive forces of self-interest; but it is precisely this conception which has most need of a supernatural sanction. Lack of such a sanction in the world of the *Promessi Sposi* opened

the way to feudal anarchy. Each petty tyrant was concerned only to follow his own will, and the representatives of the law—like the corrupt advocate Azzecca-garbugli to whom Renzo applied for help in his trouble—became parasitic upon the strong in following their own self-interest. The result is expressed in the ironic advice given to Renzo by his cousin—' seek to avoid justice, as I shall seek to avoid the plague.' But the root cause of this anarchy lies in the individual conscience. Renzo's own ' justice ' has no absolute reference, but is simply an affirmation of his own desires and a determination to obtain them by force. In short, Renzo, by following his natural instincts, has placed himself, however excusably, at the level of Don Rodrigo. Short of accepting the standard of perfect justice revealed in the Gospel and actualized in his doctrine of humility, there is for Manzoni no objectively valid (that is, true) conception of justice; there is only the desire, more or less conscious, of the individual to achieve his selfish ends. In the individual, the most natural desires are tainted with self-will and may even lead, as in Renzo, to a willingness to do murder; in society, order and the possibility of progress are sacrificed to anarchy. All this is implied in Fra Cristoforo's retort to Renzo: ' Tu lo sai, tu, quale sia la giustizia '; and again: ' tu, verme della terra, tu vuoi far giustizia.'[3] Fra Cristoforo, who has himself killed a man in following the impulse of his own pride, knows the consequences of these unchecked affirmations of the self; indeed, he has expiated them in a life-long struggle to achieve humility under the religious habit. Only, therefore, when Renzo has renounced the following of his own will does Fra Cristoforo release Lucia from her vow; and it is important to realize that this dispensation arises from a submission to the ruling of the Church. The way is thus opened to the natural happiness which Renzo desired in his marriage; but the friar's words indicate that even this natural happiness has been transformed in the light of the experience of this book:

> ' Love one another as fellow-travellers, with the knowledge that you must part, and with the hope of coming together again for ever. Thank God who has brought you into this state, not

[3] ' You, indeed, *you* know what justice is!'
' You, worm of the earth, *you* want to do justice!'

through a turbulent and transitory happiness, but by hardships and in the midst of misery in order to dispose you to resigned and tranquil joy.' (Ch. XXVI).

Once more the turbulent experience of life has been brought into submission within the framework of the novel; and once more we must admit, after recognizing the power of Manzoni's control and the essential part it plays in his genius, to a certain sense of loss. There are passages in the *Promessi Sposi* which prove the depth of Manzoni's sense of the reality and richness of natural happiness, just as there are passages in which the vivacity and grace of Lucia are fugitively presented. But always there is the sense that experience must be forced into the mould of whose necessity Manzoni is so deeply convinced; and so Lucia becomes less a person than a symbol of consistency, and natural ' joy,' in itself ' turbulent and transitory,' is transformed into something new, ' resigned and tranquil.' But the greatness of the novel consists precisely in the tension between the submission which Manzoni feels to be essential, if the significance and validity of experience is to be maintained, and emotions and ideas whose power and complexity often make it difficult to submit.

Manzoni presents these issues most clearly in two characters who stand a little apart from the main development of his book. The Innominato only enters the story at the summons of the thwarted Don Rodrigo and disappears when his decisive part in it has been played; and the story of Gertrude, the nun of Monza, reads like a romantic incident inserted quite superfluously into the novel. In these two contrasted characters, however, Manzoni's analysis of the problem of free will receives its fullest expression; perhaps their very isolation from the main stream of the book helps to concentrate our attention upon the issues involved. In each case, the human will, conscious of the need for asserting its proper autonomy, is set against the deterministic development of a chain of exterior events which threaten to enslave it. The Innominato, by his conversion, breaks his chain; Gertrude fails to break hers and is lost.

The Innominato appears from the first as something more than a mere tyrant, a mediocrity of the type of Don Rodrigo engaged in the satisfying of his petty desires. This eminence makes him more dangerous than Don Rodrigo, who is, indeed, almost his

dependant; but it also makes him, unlike Don Rodrigo, capable of redemption. Tyranny corresponds in the Innominato to an intimate necessity of his nature: the necessity, that is, of exercising a decisive influence upon events, of affirming the power of his own will. 'To do whatever was forbidden by the laws or impeded by any force; to be arbiter and master in the affairs of others, *without other interest than the pleasure of commanding* . . . such had been at all times the principal passions of this man.' 'Without other interest than the pleasure of commanding'—that is the feature which marks off the Innominato from the petty selfishness of Don Rodrigo. It drives him above all to aim at achieving independence from good and evil alike by acting in disregard of all moral checks, which he considers merely as obstacles to the freedom of his action: 'in despite,' as Manzoni says, 'of right and wrong, those two considerations which place so many *obstacles* before the human will, and cause it so frequently to turn back.' The Innominato, in short, reflects Manzoni's interest in the autonomous will which, freed from the obligations of any valid conception of morality, acts only in order to assert its own independence.

Having established in his character this devotion to the pure will, Manzoni proceeds to point out the contradictions which underlie it. The actions of the Innominato are deprived of any significance by their very independence from any moral check and lead logically to a determinism which ends by destroying the very possibility of free will. The crisis which overtakes him when confronted by Lucia is much more than an arbitrary piece of edifying fiction; it is carefully prepared for by a long sequence of developments which lead logically to the recognition of futility. In the moment which precedes this crisis, the Innominato realizes that the whole course of his past life has been void; in the absence of any overruling conception to give significance to his actions, each crime follows its predecessor logically, inevitably, and with the utmost futility. On the one hand, his lawless acts now proceed from mere habit, and have actually become distasteful to him; on the other, he feels himself quite without the strength (in other words, the motive) to arrest what has now become a mechanical development. Having promised Don Rodrigo to carry off Lucia, his thoughts show already a full awareness of his position: 'I have served him because . . . because I have promised and I have promised because . . .

it is my destiny.' 'It is my destiny'; the Innominato, caught in his very desire to be not merely free but autonomous, independent of the moral law, has ended by being caught in a determinism so rigid that it implies an abandonment of the very power of choice. 'Time rose up before him, empty of every intention, every occupation, every desire'; the will itself becomes an illusion, and this fact, now clearly realized for the first time, induces in the Innominato the sensation of a 'tremendous solitude'—the solitude of a man who sees no further significance in the exercise of his own power.

At this point, Manzoni brings into play a new consideration—the thought of death. The thought is peculiarly appropriate to the Innominato in his present position. At the end of every course of action, however vast and extravagant, he sees death, before which the simple affirmation of the independence of the will becomes futile, insignificant. The decisive question which now faces him is contained in the thought of his approaching old age: 'To grow old! to die! and then?' The terms in which Manzoni states his problem are traditional, form an integral part of the Catholic outlook; but behind these terms lies his continual preoccupation with the crisis of the independent will. It is noteworthy that the Innominato, like Kirillov in Dostoievsky's *Possessed*, is driven to the thought of suicide.

But the Innominato, like his creator, is too deeply immersed in the Catholic tradition to allow himself to fall into the depths of anarchy. He breaks his chain by his conversion. Looking back, at the decisive moment, over the actions of his fruitless past before the Cardinal he affirms that—'I have one, which I can at once break, undo, repair.' The first verb recalls the chain of determined events which he is breaking by a decisive act of the will. In freeing Lucia, the Innominato submits for the first time to a moral law which henceforth gives significance to his actions by allowing him to choose between good and evil and in the light of which even death becomes a fateful crisis in the spiritual development of the individual. By submitting to the objective content of Christian revelation the Innominato, according to Manzoni, regains his true liberty and frees himself from the empty determinism which had been the logical consequence of his desire for absolute autonomy.

The tragedy of Gertrude, whose fate is precisely the opposite of that of the Innominato, is summed up in Manzoni's brief com-

ment: ' Crime is a rigid and inflexible master, against whom he alone becomes strong who rebels entirely. To this Gertrude *did not wish to resolve herself: and she obeyed.*' Like the Innominato, Gertrude is caught in an inflexable chain of events: only, whereas the chain of the Innominato has been of his own creation, that of the unhappy nun had been imposed upon her by circumstances beyond her control. Desiring for herself from the first the happiness of a wife and a great lady, Gertrude remains throughout unable either to assert her own will against her father or to accept the consolations of the religious state. Manzoni insists that Gertrude, even whilst remaining a nun, could have found happiness by accepting her misfortunes and making them the basis of a responsible life. The Christian religion, he observes, ' is a road so made, that from whatever labyrinth, from whatever precipice a man comes upon it, *and takes a step upon it,* he can from thenceforward walk on with safety and a good will, to arrive happily at a happy end." In the thought which underlies this passage we feel once more that intimate connection between the individual character and the force of surrounding circumstances which we have seen to be so typical of Manzoni. The behaviour of Gertrude is conditioned, moulded by the logic of past events; the action open to her consists in accepting the complex of circumstances at a given moment and in making it significant by a decisive act of the will. This delicate dovetailing of interior impulse and exterior influence is reminiscent of Machiavelli's statement in the *Principe* of the relationship between man's decisions and the action of impersonal Fortune:

> ' And I compare her (Fortune) to one of these ruinous rivers which, when they become angry, flood the plains, ruin trees and houses, take land from one part and deposit it on the other: everyone flies before them, everyone yields to their assault, without being able to resist at any point. And yet, although they have this nature, this does not prevent men from making provision with dams and banks when conditions are quiet, so that the floods, when they come, either flow in a channel or make their assault in a manner neither so unlimited nor so harmful." (*Principe.* Ch. XXV).

Manzoni is dealing with the individual conscience and Machiavelli with political expediency, but both are concerned with asserting and

defining the prerogatives of the will in relation to a deterministic chain of events. Machiavelli insists that it is the Prince's duty, by his decision, to convert a turbulent and perilous stream into an orderly channel; Manzoni affirms that, to give life significance, it is essential to take one's own step, to *choose* freely, to accept what the logic of past events has made inevitable, in order to give it validity in relation to a religious attitude towards life. It is the kernel of his belief, in fact, that the moral will can insert itself, through its conscious act, at any point into the logical development of a series of events so as to give them meaning and to liberate the personality from the chain of determinism. The story of Gertrude is followed with extraordinary psychological and spiritual insight; but the essential part of it is that Gertrude never made this act of conscious acceptance, so that her life remained a hopeless conflict between helpless desires and the compulsion of external events. Lacking as a girl the courage to oppose her father's will, she yet allowed herself to respond to the advances of a page-boy, so that the discovery of her love merely made her 'guilt' more apparent and her fate more secure. Later, after she has become a nun, she surrenders to her passion for Egidio and commits murder to conceal it. In this way Gertrude, who began as a pathetic victim of circumstances, ends as a criminal. Manzoni's awareness that the circumstances of her childhood, however beyond her control, could only lead unless firmly repudiated to crimes for which she is fully responsible, saves his story from romantic excesses and gives it tragic quality; unlike the Innominato, Gertrude remains throughout the victim of a fate which only a decisive act on her part could have avoided.

The *Promessi Sposi* is remarkable, as I have already indicated, for the absolute coherence shown in it between personal and social problems. Manzoni is as much concerned to examine the foundations of the political optimism which he inherited from the eighteenth century as to guarantee the relevance of his own moral instincts. The two problems are, indeed, obviously complementary. If personal morality demands, as we have seen, an objective basis, the conception of social justice, of the necessary relation between rights and duties assumed by Parini and inherited by Manzoni, has equal need of a guarantee; for, in the words of a comment from the *Promessi Sposi*, 'Right and wrong are never so clearly divided

that either side is possessed only of one or the other.' Without such a guarantee the individual is driven to the simple affirmation of his own will, and society is divided inevitably into the strong, who seek to impose their own desires upon humanity, and the weak, to whom no course is open but resignation. The central fact in Manzoni's meticulous and detailed study of seventeenth-century society is this division between ' i prepotenti ' and ' gli umili,' the oppressors and the oppressed. This division becomes, in the absence of the moral law, increasingly and fatally acute: ' You survive to live in an unhappy age: the days we see are evil, but those which are maturing will be worse: the sons of the insolent, of the proud, of the violent will be more so than their fathers.'[4] The profound pessimism implied in Manzoni's interpretation of history is simply a logical development from the disintegration of the moral law; the Innominato and Lucia, besides representing contrasted possibilities in the moral crisis of the individual, stand at opposite poles of social development.

But if the unbridled increase of feudal tyranny is a necessary deduction from Manzoni's moral interpretation of events in seventeenth-century Italy, so is the ultimate proof of their vanity. The great plague is the climax of the whole book, the common event in which great and humble are simultaneously involved and from which there is, humanly speaking, no escape. It brings to the ' prepotenti ' that sense of helplessness which came to the Innominato with the thought of death; because it is something outside their control, before which every achievement of the will, every affirmation of power, appears irrelevant. Manzoni's account of its birth and development is the supreme example of that dynamic logic which we have isolated as characteristic of his genius and which communicates itself to the movement of his prose. His description of the first appearance of the plague in Milan is typical:

> ' . . . cominciarono, prima nel borgo di Porta Orientale, poi in ogni quartiere della città, a farsi frequenti le malattie, le morti, con accidenti strani di spasimi, di palpitazioni, di letargo, di delirio, con quelle insegne funeste di lividi e di bubboni; morti

[4]Fra Cristoforo speaking to Renzo, after he has survived the plague, in the first, unpublished draft of the novel (1824).

per lo più celeri, violente, non di rado repentine, senza alcun indizio antecedente di malattia.' (Ch. XXXI).[5]

The sentence begins quietly with ' cominciarono '; then it pauses, as though to take breath, with an exact description of place, before expanding ominously with ' frequenti.' From this point it flows on with an ever-increasing sense of catastrophe; we have ' malattie,' which give way first to ' morti ' and then, with an increase of horror and despair, to ' spasimi,' and the accompanying ' palpitazioni,' ' letargo,' ' delirio,' so that we feel in the very movement of the prose the compelling action of the divine will involving all, humble and exalted alike, in its course. Before this scourge every affirmation of self-will, every act of human power becomes vain, and the individual crisis of the Innominato is repeated throughout society. The only human action which still has value, according to Manzoni, is the willing and humble acceptance of the Christian philosophy which, once accepted, can give significance to these terrible events and value to these sufferings. Upon this acceptance is based, furthermore, the only possibility of true justice; so much is made clear, as we have seen, in the story of Renzo and in the teaching of Fra Cristoforo. In this way, the ' symbolic ' significance of Lucia's submission is seen to be capable of extension to the complexities of social life. It is far from Manzoni's purpose or from the spirit of his philosophy to draw misty Utopias, but his relief at having attained personal coherence, at having balanced his moral and his social instincts in the light of Christian teaching, is felt in his wonderful account of the rain-storm which marks the end of the sultriness and horror of the plague and speaks also of a spiritual revival: ' Renzo, instead of worrying, slipped happily into the rain, enjoyed himself in that freshening downpour, in the whispering and murmuring of grass and leaf, all trembling, dripping, bright,

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[5] ' The illnesses and deaths began to increase in frequency, first in the Quarter of Porta Orientale, then in every part of the town, with strange outbreaks of spasms, palpitations, lethargy and delirium, with those dreadful marks of sores and plague-spots; deaths for the most part speedy and violent, not rarely sudden, without any preceding indication of illness.'

and restored to their greenness; he breathed amply, freely, and fully; and in that *resolution* of nature he felt, as it were, more freely and more keenly what had been performed in his destiny.' The *Promessi Sposi,* written to teach the most uncompromising submission, ends significantly on a note of liberty.

D. A. Traversi.

PRINCE HAMLET[1]

IT is often necessary for the reader of Shakespeare to remind himself that ' Shakespearean Tragedy ' is not all of one kind. In *Macbeth,* for example, the speeches of the protagonists refer not merely inwards to a hypothetical ' character ' behind them, but outward to the pattern of the play as a whole in which ' character ' is subordinate and often irrelevant. In *Othello,* on the other hand, the hero's character—in so far as we are intended to be aware of it, and we are aware of it only through the poetry—emerges from the pattern and interest is centred there. In this respect, as in so many others, *Hamlet* is a difficult play to feel sure of ; but it seems to me that here we are required, more explicitly and more continuously than in *Macbeth,* or *Lear* or *Antony and Cleopatra,* to be aware of, and therefore to assess, a particular state of mind and feeling embodied in the dramatic figure of the hero. The purpose of these notes is to suggest that most critical judgments concerning

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[1]The following Shakespeare criticism has also appeared in *Scrutiny*: L. C. Knights on the *Sonnets,* Vol. III, No. 2; F. R. Leavis on *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Othello,* Vol. V, No. 2, and Vol. VI, No. 3; F. C. Tinkler on *Winter's Tale* and *Cymbeline,* Vol. V, No. 4, and Vol. VII, No. 1; D. A. Traversi on *Coriolanus* and *Troilus and Cressida,* Vol. VI, No. 1, and Vol. VII, No. 3; James Smith on *As You Like It,* Vol. IX, No. 1.

We hope to publish an essay on *Macbeth* by James Smith in an early number.

Prince Hamlet have ignored or misinterpreted some important parts of the evidence.

Recent criticism of *Hamlet*, recognizing the stubborn way in which the play resists attempts at consistent interpretation, has made much of the historical method of approach. We now know a good deal about the conventions of malcontent and revenge plays on the one hand and about the social background of late Elizabethan melancholy on the other; and we think we know something of the difficulties Shakespeare had to face in re-working a play already familiar to his audience.[1] But the accumulated knowledge of the context of the play, though it has corrected some obvious errors, has made remarkably little difference in the current estimate of the hero, which remains substantially the Romantic estimate. Thus Professor Dover Wilson, the play's latest learned editor, assures us that *Hamlet* is ' a study of genius,' and that the Prince is ' the most adorable of heroes.' ' Shakespeare asks every spectator, every reader, to *sympathize* with his hero, to feel with him, to place himself in his shoes.'[2]

How far we are invited to sympathize with Hamlet is at least a debatable question, but I can find no evidence at all for the first of Professor Dover Wilson's assertions and little enough for the second. Hamlet's speeches, it is true, have at times a bookish flavour, and the range of his thoughts is often suggested though never demonstrated, but neither a familiarity with books nor a habit of philosophic musing is sufficient to rank a man as a genius. There is, it is true, considerable evidence of superior mental agility, expressing itself in wit and satire. But Hamlet's wit—and this seems the critical observation to start from—is of a peculiar and limited kind. With very few exceptions it is entirely destructive, malicious and sterile. When Hamlet bids the Player, ' Follow that lord and look you mock him not,' when he says, ' We shall obey, were she ten times our mother,' and when he demonstrates to Claudius how a

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[1]See J. M. Robertson, *The Problem of Hamlet,* and L. Schücking, *The Meaning of Hamlet* (tr. Graham Rawson).

[2]Introduction to *Hamlet* (C.U.P.), p. lxiv ; *What Happens in Hamlet?* pp. 44 and 229. Compare Coleridge, *Lectures on Shakespeare* (Bohn Edition), pp. 342 ff. (' we see a great, an almost enormous intellectual activity . . .').

king may go a progress through the guts of a beggar, the reader's reaction is not, I think, a sense of liberation but rather the feeling, 'How I—in certain moods and in certain contexts—should have enjoyed saying that!' Santayana seems to be pointing to this quality of Hamlet's wit when he remarks of such 'idealism' as Hamlet displays that it 'is lame because it cannot conceive a better alternative to the thing it criticizes. It stops at bickerings and lamentations which, although we cannot deny the ample warrant they have in experience, leave us disconcerted and in an unstable equilibrium, ready to revert, when imagination falters, to all our old platitudes and conventional judgments.'[3] The function of Hamlet's satirical girdings—think, for example, of the celebrated 'fishmonger' scene with Polonius (II. ii.)—is plainly to satisfy an emotional animus which exhausts itself in its own immediate gratification.

Now it seems to me that a similar self-indulgent quality lurks behind all of Hamlet's most pronounced attitudes, even when he is ostensibly on the side of the angels. As in many neurotics Hamlet's exaggerated sense of unworthiness ('What should such creatures as I do crawling between heaven and earth?') goes with considerable readiness to pronounce on the faults of other people. His reforming zeal, however, even when it is directed against the genuinely bad or despicable, is hardly remarkable for either charity or self-knowledge. Mr. Wilson Knight, in two interesting essays in *The Wheel of Fire*, has rightly emphasized the bitterness, cynicism and hatred which mark Hamlet's dealings with others in the middle scenes of the play, instancing his cruelty to Ophelia, his 'demoniac pleasure' in the thought of ensuring the King's damnation, the callousness with which he sends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their death, 'not shriving time allowed,' and the 'most withering, brutal and unnecessary sarcasm' which, towards the end of Act III, Scene iv., he addresses to the Queen. What has to be added is that Hamlet's hectoring of the Queen is not only brutal, it is obstinately self-righteous:—

> Forgive me this my virtue,
> For in the fatness of these pursy times

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[3] *Obiter Scripta*, p. 40.

> Virtue itself of vice must pardon beg,
> Yea, curb and woo for leave to do him good.

Self-righteousness informs his forgiveness of himself for the murder of Polonius

> —For this same lord,
> I do repent; but heaven hath pleased it so,
> To punish me with this, and this with me—

and for the murder of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern—' They are not near my conscience '; and the same inability to admit that he, Hamlet, might have been wrong betrays itself in the too easy apology to Laertes for the hysterical outburst in the graveyard:—

> If Hamlet from himself be ta'en away,
> And when he's not himself does wrong Laertes,
> Then Hamlet does it not; Hamlet denies it. . . . .
> Hamlet is of the faction that is wrong'd;
> His madness is poor Hamlet's enemy.

What Hamlet's wit, his cruelty and his self-righteousness have in common is a quality of moral relaxation which more or less subtly distorts the values for which he professes to stand. His scourging of corruption is hardly ever impersonal. In his pretended concern for Ophelia's chastity (III. i.), in the obscenities which he directs towards her in the play scene (III. ii.), and in the fascinated insistence on lust in his long interview with his mother (III. iv.), Hamlet seems intent not so much on exposing lust as on indulging an uncontrollable spite against the flesh.

> Nay, but to live
> In the rank sweat of an enseamed bed,
> Stew'd in corruption, honeying and making love
> Over the nasty sty.

The heated tone, the peculiar violence and limited range of the imagery in such lines as these sharply distinguishes them from the vigorous impersonality of Vindice's meditations on the skull of his mistress.

That there is an intimate connexion between Hamlet's sexual nausea and his feelings about death is now commonly admitted; what seems to be less generally realized is the significance of this

connexion. Mr. Wilson Knight, for example, after some pages of excellent analysis and evaluation, proceeds to attribute Hamlet's cynical bitterness simply to an overwhelming preoccupation with death which he tries to show as not merely touching but noble. ' He is a superman among men. And he is a superman because he has walked and held converse with Death, and his consciousness works in terms of Death and the Negation of Cynicism.' Forgetting his own injunction against sentimentalizing the personality of the Prince Mr. Knight thus contrives a partial rehabilitation of the Romantic Hamlet. ' We properly know Hamlet himself,' he writes, ' only when he is alone with Death: then he is lovable and gentle, then he is beautiful and noble, and, there being no trivial things of life to blur our vision, our minds are tuned to the exquisite beauty of his soul. We know the real Hamlet only in his address to the Ghost, in his " To be or not to be . . ." soliloquy, in the lyric prose of the graveyard scene . . . These touch a melody that holds no bitterness. Here, and when he is dying, we glimpse, perhaps, a thought wherein death, not life, holds the deeper assurance for humanity.'[4]

Now whatever elements of beauty and pathos may be found in the expression of Hamlet's feelings about death it may be doubted whether his attitude is exactly that of a superman. A superman is, presumably, someone who is capable of making a sustained effort to grasp experiences beyond the reach of ordinary men; whereas what is most characteristic of Hamlet's meditations on death is something similar to the quality of moral relaxation which we have already noted,—a desire to lapse *back* from the level of adult consciousness. The ' To be or not to be . . .' soliloquy has given rise to a vast amount of critical discussion, centring mainly on the question whether Hamlet is inspired primarily by thoughts of suicide or by thoughts of active opposition to the King. Certainly the specific reference is not clear, for if the ' quietus ' with ' a bare bodkin ' can only refer to suicide, the ' enterprises of great pitch and moment ' can only refer to stratagems against the King, whilst the act of ' opposing ' which ends all troubles is left ambiguous. That confusion, however, is of minor importance. What really matters is the quite unambiguous way in which Hamlet expresses what is,

[4] *The Wheel of Fire*, pp. 42 and 50.

for him, the essential difference between life and death. The speech is built up on two contrasted sets of metaphors. Life, ' this mortal coil,' is at best something which hampers and impedes, imposing ' fardels ' under which we ' grunt and sweat '; the ' slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,' ' the thousand natural shocks,' and ' the whips and scorns of time ' present it as an actively hostile force; and in ' a sea of troubles ' the power which it has to inflict pain is felt as continuous and irresistible like the sea. Death, on the other hand, is presented simply as a relaxing of tension and an abandonment of the struggle. The reiterated ' sleep,' the soothing ' quietus,' and the smooth and weighted ' consummation '

> —Quiet consummation have
> And renowned be thy grave—

make plain why death is so ardently desired by a spirit which, whether ' suffering ' or ' opposing,' feels itself continually on the defensive against a world conceived as entirely hostile.[5]

The desire to escape from the complexities of adult living is central to Hamlet's character. It runs through the play from the opening lines of the first soliloquy, with their images of melting and yielding (I. ii., 129-130), to Hamlet's final welcoming of death as ' felicity.' The attitudes which appeal to Hamlet and in which he finds relief are all simplified attitudes, and he admires the uncomplicated forthrightness of Fortinbras—justifying his ' divine ambition ' by a sophistical argument[6]—for fundamentally the same

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[5]It is perhaps significant that reason—stressed throughout the play as man's noblest and most godlike quality, ' without the which we are pictures or mere beasts'—is quite early referred to as beleaguered behind its ' pales and forts ' (I, iv. 28). On the general question of regressive tendencies and the longing for death there are some illuminating passages in D. W. Harding's ' A Note on Nostalgia,' in *Determinations*, pp. 67ff.

[6] Rightly to be great
Is not to stir without great argument,
But greatly to find quarrel in a straw
When honour's at the stake. (IV. iv. 53-56).

—The word ' honour ' begs the question.

reason that he finds the cloak of madness congenial. Even when he is alone, inspired by the Player's speech, he indulges himself in a fantasy in which to ' cleave the general ear with horrid speech ' seems like a genuine solution of difficulties; and his exaggerated play-acting soon takes on the obvious forms of melodrama :—

> Am I a coward?
> Who calls me villain? breaks my pate across? . . .
> Who does me this? Ha![7]

The distinguishing feature of melodrama is, of course, that it over-simplifies what are in reality complicated problems and relationships, and the tendency noted here is in line with Hamlet's most marked characteristics. His attitudes of hatred, revulsion, self-complacence and self-reproach, I have suggested, are, in their one-sided insistence, forms of escape from the difficult process of complex adjustment which normal living demands and which Hamlet finds beyond his powers.

Reflections such as these lead inevitably to a further question. If, by any standards of maturity at all adequate to the later plays, Hamlet appears as fundamentally immature, may we suppose that Shakespeare, at the time of writing the play, deliberately intended he should appear so? Is Hamlet an ' objective ' study, or is he—as a persistent tradition affirms—peculiarly near to his creator, whose first demand on spectators and readers is that they should ' sympathize ' with the Prince, ' feel with him,' and ' place themselves in his shoes ' ?

This question, like most others concerning this puzzling play, does not admit of a simple answer. While Frank Harris's view of a complete identification of Shakespeare and Hamlet is obviously untenable, it is nevertheless difficult to believe that Hamlet is entirely objectified. It is not merely that in Hamlet's most characteristic speeches there is nothing positive, no technical device, to which one can point—as one can point to the sonorous, simplifying rhetoric of Othello or to the devices by which Jonson makes his figures express their own condemnation[8]—as clear proof of a

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[7]Compare III, iii. 407-411 (' Now could I drink hot blood '), and V. i. 276-306 (the ranting in Ophelia's grave).

[8]On *Othello* see F. R. Leavis's essay in *Scrutiny*, December, 1937.

critical intention. The speeches themselves, particularly the soliloquies, seem to focus a wide background of feeling which is not clearly defined. It is Francisco who sets the tone of the first scene, and of the play, with his terse

> 'tis bitter cold,
> And I am sick at heart

—a note which is echoed not only by Hamlet—' The time is out of joint '—but by Marcellus,—' Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.' Fortinbras, we are told, supposes the state to be ' disjoint and out of frame,' and we hear of the common people, ' muddied, thick and unwholesome in their thoughts and whispers.' Such allusions have a cumulative effect in creating a rather sinister accompaniment to the main action, and the sinister tone is strongly reinforced by the prevailing imagery of physical corruption and disease, which appears as persistently in the speeches of the King as in the speeches of Hamlet himself.[9] The Ghost, moreover, expresses the same view of himself as Hamlet does—

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[9]It seems unnecessary to collect examples of metaphors drawn from the various ills of the body, but I should like to suggest that the disease imagery evidences a particular preoccupation with *unseen* corruption. The King twice refers to Hamlet as having, or being, a concealed disease (II. ii. 17-18, IV. i. 21-23), and Hamlet declares of Fortinbras' expedition (IV. iv. 27-29):

> This is the imposthume of much wealth and peace,
> That inward breaks, and shows no cause without
> Why the man dies.

Professor Dover Wilson's notes (see his edition of *Hamlet*, p. 221) explain ' imposthume ' (abscess) in the context, but I can see no reason for the description ' that inward breaks, and shows no cause without . . .' Shakespeare's mind seems to have unconsciously reverted to the image used by Hamlet a few short scenes previously (III. iv. 147-149):

> It will but skin and film the ulcerous place,
> Whilst rank corruption, mining all within,
> Infects unseen.

> What a falling off was there!
> From me, whose love was of that dignity
> That it went hand in hand even with the vow
> I made to her in marriage; and to decline
> Upon a wretch, whose natural gifts were poor
> To those of mine. (I. v. 47-52.)

And if it is objected that his is due simply to the conventional explicitness of the Elizabethan drama, one has still to explain the sweet, nostalgic ending of the play, when Horatio—responding exactly to the mood of Hamlet's ' Absent thee from felicity awhile,' —speak words of quiet reassurance such as one might use in putting a child to bed:

> Good night, sweet prince,
> And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!

There is, finally, at least one point in the play where Hamlet is made the mouthpiece of sentiments which Shakespeare expresses in his non-dramatic verse. In the ' To be or not to be . . .' soliloquy, the ' whips and scorns of time ' are particularized in a brief catalogue of ills

—' The oppressors wrong, the proud man's contumely . . .'—

strongly reminiscent of the list of complaints against the world in Sonnet LXVI:—

> Tir'd with all these, *for restful death I cry,*
> As, to behold desert a beggar born,
> And needy nothing trimm'd in jollity . . .[10]

Readers may differ about the significance to be attached to indications of this kind, but there does seem to be some ground for believing that Hamlet, in his recoil from the grossness of physical existence and his desire for death, expresses feelings which were personal to Shakespeare and not merely dramatically conceived. If this is so it may help to explain why the ' negative ' verse expressing loathing and recoil is, on the whole, so much more forceful than the

[10]At III. iii. 58, ' Offence's gilded hand ' seems to echo the ' gilded honour ' of the sonnet.

passages in which any positive values are indicated. Ophelia's description of the earlier Hamlet (III. i. 158-168), like Hamlet's description of his hero-father (III. iv. 53-63), is weak and general compared with the astounding force and particularity of Hamlet's scathing comments on his mother's lust or on his uncle's guilt.

It is, however, impossible to believe that Hamlet is *merely* a mouthpiece, or to accept without qualification Ernest Jones's contention that, ' The play is simply the form in which his [Shakespeare's] deepest unconscious feelings find their spontaneous expression, without any inquiry being possible on his part as to the essential nature or source of those feelings.'[11] Apart from scattered passages of objective comment on Hamlet's ' madness,' his rashness, and his ' bloody deeds,' there are scenes where Shakespeare seems deliberately to point a contrast between the common sense and common kindliness of ' normal ' people and the obstinate self-centredness and suspicion of the maladjusted individual: Act I. scene ii. is, I think, such a scene, and the unfavourable impression made by Hamlet's sullen replies to the sensible suggestions of Claudius and Gertrude can hardly have been unintended. But the main evidence of Shakespeare's conscious, critical control is of another kind: it lies in the extraordinary dramatic and poetic power which, if it does not achieve the tight-knit unity of *Macbeth* or *Coriolanus,* expresses itself in a firm and flexible prose (prose which can be beautifully *spoken*) and, here and there, in imagery which can compare in force and vividness (though not in complexity) with anything in the later plays:—

> . . . if his occulted guilt
> Do not itself unkennel in one speech . . .

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[11] *Essays in Applied Psycho-Analysis* (' The Oedipus Complex as an Explanation of Hamlet's Mystery '), pp. 59-60. I do not feel qualified to discuss the psychological issues involved in Dr. Jones's interesting essay, which is sometimes brushed aside too easily by literary critics. Although some modifications of the Freudian account of the play's genesis may suggest themselves to the non-specialist reader, there is no doubt that the essay helps to explain the persistence of the Hamlet legend and the popularity of Shakespeare's play.

> . . . a vice of kings;
> A cut-purse of the empire and the rule,
> That from a shelf the precious diadem stole,
> And put it in his pocket!
>
> . . . and we ourselves compelled
> Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults
> To give in evidence.

One feels that lines such as these, which are free from the suggestion of mere emotional *relief* that clings to some of the equally striking imagery of lust, are evidence enough of a mind playing freely on its subject; just as one feels that the skilful delineation of varied types within the play is incompatible with anything but a high degree of self-possession on the part of the poet. Concentration on the figure of Hamlet is apt to make us overlook such things as the speech in which Claudius is first presented to us,—a perfect piece of dramatic self-revelation, modulating from the unctuous and calculated hypocrisy of the opening lines

> —Though yet of Hamlet our dear brother's death
> The memory be green, and that it us befitted
> To bear our hearts in grief and our whole kingdom
> To be contracted in one brow of woe . . .—[13]

to the business-like efficiency of the close. Polonius has had more attention, but it is pertinent to remark here how surely and consistently he is presented in terms of a gross and naïve self-assurance which seems deliberately chosen to provide something more than a simple ironic contrast to the doubt and uncertainty of Hamlet. The lines in which Polonius explains his maxim, ' To thine own self be true,' remind us that there is, after all, some value in a more inquiring attitude towards the self and its duties.

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[13]Milton seems to have taken a hint from the tone and movement of these lines in the presentation of Belial in *Paradise Lost*, Book II;—

> I should be much for open war, O peers,
> As not behind in hate, if what was urged
> Main reason to persuade immediate war
> Did not dissuade me most . . .

Between the view that Hamlet is an objective study of a particular kind of immaturity and the view that it is a spontaneous and uncritical expression of Shakespeare's own unconscious feelings it seems necessary to make a compromise. To suppose—as one must—that Shakespeare was ignorant of the deeper sources of the malaise expressed by Hamlet does not commit us to believing him incapable of assessing the symptoms of that malaise in relation to a developed —or, it seems more accurate to say, developing—scale of values. But the implicit evaluation is not so subtle or so sure as in the later plays, and one is forced to the conclusion that this play contains within itself widely different levels of experience and insight which, since they cannot be assimilated into a whole, create a total effect of ambiguity. (This would help to explain why on different minds *Hamlet* can make such different impressions; since it offers unusually varied possibilities of interpretation you pick what pleases you and what your temperament demands.) That *Hamlet* does in fact represent successive stages of Shakespeare's development is suggested by the bibliographical evidence, and the literary evidence is even more conclusive. Probably no other play of Shakespeare's contains such an assortment of varied styles, ranging from an easy naturalism to a rather stiff formality; passages such as the Player's speech (II. ii.) and the curious, almost Miltonic, description of Ophelia's death (IV. vii.) suggest deliberate experiment. Anything like precise dating of the verse strata is of course impossible. It is sufficient to note that some of the verse is in Shakespeare's quite early manner—' Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes . . .' (I. i.), or, for a different effect, ' I could a tale unfold whose lightest word . . .' (I. v.); that both the substance and style of the King's speech, ' But that I know love is begun by time . . .' (IV. vii.), would justify us, if we did not know the context, in attributing the lines to *Troilus and Cressida,* an obviously ' transitional ' play; and that there are passages of mature prose and authentically ' Shakespearean ' blank verse. If, as seems likely, the play was written and retouched over a number of years, that would help to account for the co-existence of the different levels of consciousness that one seems to find within it.

To those who like to feel wholehearted sympathy or antipathy for the characters of a play, and who like to feel assured that they are safely following clear moral judgments imposed by the author,

the views that I have outlined will seem both inconclusive and perverse. To the charge of inconclusiveness I have already indicated a reply: *Hamlet* has always seemed something of a puzzle and the unusual discrepancies of critical opinion suggest that a certain ambivalence is inherent in the play itself. As for the charge of a perverse denigration of the character of Hamlet—' the most adorable of heroes '—there is at least one misunderstanding that can be guarded against. A clearsighted view of the fundamental weaknesses of Hamlet's personality is by no means incompatible with a lively dramatic sympathy, for the simple reason that for everyone Hamlet represents a possible kind of experience. Indeed for most of us it is more than merely possible; in a different sense from that intended by Coleridge, we have ' a smack of Hamlet ' ourselves, to say the least of it. It is in fact the strength of our own regressive impulses and unconscious confusions that tempts us to see the play in a false perspective. I would say that, read as it commonly is, with a large degree of identification between reader and hero, *Hamlet* can provide an indulgence for some of our most cherished weaknesses—so deeply cherished that we can persuade ourselves that they are virtues—but it is incapable of leading us far towards maturity and self-knowledge. It is only when Shakespeare's attitude is seen to be more critical than is commonly supposed, and when we ourselves make a determined effort to assess that attitude, that we are in a position to see *Hamlet* in relation to the supreme achievement—the achieved maturity—of the later plays.

L. C. KNIGHTS.

COMMENTS AND REVIEWS

A STATEMENT OF POSITIVES

THE POOL OF VISHNU, by L. H. Myers (Cape, 9/6 net).

Naïvely, no doubt, I began by feeling disappointed with *The Pool of Vishnu* and only gradually came to see it as being in certain respects the most important book that Mr. Myers has written. It may seem disappointing if one looks to it to complete the pattern of *The Root and the Flower*. It ties off the loose threads, certainly, but it neglects the intricate designs that they seemed to have begun. For instance, the subtle flawing of Amar's fitness to retire from the world is examined no further and, flawed or not, he is packed off among the pilgrims; Daniyal and the intricate web that he had spun around Amar and Hari are brushed aside; Hari and Sita, who were challenged by circumstances to test and develop their love, see no hope for themselves and are spared the necessity of taking up the challenge.

The sympathetic characters of the earlier book are treated as though they belonged to an old order and were too far off the true line of spiritual development to redeem their partial failures. Jali's development—the axis of the whole book—is guided and interpreted by the Guru, and the Guru's view of things is a new departure, only very dimly foreshadowed in *The Root and the Flower*. That book deals in the negatives. It shows certain forms of evil and it studies a number of attempts to produce better lives, attempts compelling sympathy but incompletely successful. *The Pool of Vishnu* gives a more definite and indeed a different formulation of positive standards, and as a corollary puts the emphasis on a different aspect of what is evil. Its great achievement is its determined and unembarrassed statement of positive values, free from defensive sophistication and free from the subtler defensive technique of melancholy resignation. Neither the detached shrug of Srilata nor Sita's sigh of acceptance has any validity in the new book.

The positive values are expressed at two levels: in intimate social relationships, and in the contacts between members of a broader social group. In intimate personal relationships the theme is stated in the contrast between on the one hand Hari and Sita and on the other Mohan and Damayanti. The failure of Hari and Sita is stated in Gokal's lament:

> ' " What can I do? What can I say?" Gokal was thinking, and within himself he groaned. " Oh, the pitiable inarticulateness of men! Here we are—Sitat, and Jali and Hari, and I—here we are—together, alive, and with love in our hearts! But something swathes, and clouds, and muffles us. Even I, who see what is happening, can do nothing. What kind of a parting is this going to be? There is love, but love is not understanding. Why do neither Jali nor Hari speak to her as they do to me? Why doesn't she want it? . . ." '

The theme is made plain again in the Guru's unavailing attempt to make Hari see the truth about his failure:

> ' " You should have faith in your love for Sita—and in hers for you. You should put that love to the test of candour. When it emerges unhurt you will see how beautiful and valuable is true communication between person and person, and you will be saved from your secret fear . . ." '

Mohan and Damayanti have more success in recognising the absolute pre-eminence of their need for full contact with one another. The Guru acts as an outside aid, confirming the pressure of their inner need by making them face it squarely. With his help they submit to the pain and the humiliation that they have to go through before they overcome their individual isolation. The new value they achieve stands in implicit contrast with one of the values of the old order, one which is stated here, for instance:

> ' [Gokal] was reminding himself that if, during the passage of twenty years, Amar had always approached him with confidence and felt at ease with him, that was because they each had the same reserve and the same respect for reserve in another. He remembered how intolerant Amar was of any quality of insistence or oppressiveness in another's personality. " Up till

now," thought Gokal, " I have never offended. Am I going to offend at last? ' "

Gokal does nothing, but a large part of the Guru's role in the story is to look more deeply into this policy of saving oneself and the other from mutual encroachment. His function is in some respects like that of a psycho-analyst (though a better one than most that we meet at present), and there is fine analytic insight in the dissection of Damayanti's relationship with her father. The story of Mohan and Damayanti seems to me the finest part of the novel.

Although this story is presented in the form of a flash-back it is closely connected with Mr. Myers' development of his parallel theme in broader social life. Here the positive value is stated as friendliness:

> ' The man smiled. " I see that the young Maharajah is as yet uninstructed, but it is not for me to instruct him. At Hawa Ghar he will see for himself that friendship and religion are one, and that the enemy of friendship is money—and the pride that money brings." '

The practical working of these beliefs, their subversive effect on the economic and social order, forms a large part of the book. What this order is Mr. Myers indicates through Jali's comment:

> ' " It now seems to me like this: if one sees a man struggling at the bottom of a well one is moved to do all one can to pull him out. If a man is starving one's natural impulse is to share one's food with him. Surely, it's only on second thoughts that people don't do these things? Society seems to me to be like an organised system of rather mean, second thoughts. In theory, no doubt, society helps men to help one another, but actually it provides every man with arguments for helping himself and not helping others.' "

Mohan and Damayanti apply the principles of friendship in their dealings with the peasants of whom Mohan is lord:

> ' Jali smiled. " I understand. There is no danger in religion so long as it doesn't touch upon the question of money."
>
> " All the same, the Guru never talks about money—or politics. He does nothing more than point out that friendship calls for friendliness. If friendly behaviour is quite different from

ordinary behaviour, that is not his fault. All that we are doing here is to try to treat our neighbours as friends. When Mohan received four thousand gold mohurs from Bhoj, the natural and friendly thing for him to do was to share that money with his friends here, who were all on the verge of starvation.'' '

Mr. Myers uses his position as a novelist to create a situation where friendliness does involve the sharing of money. But he is not, I think, committed to the belief that the sharing of money is in itself a virtue or the solution of social problems, and his novel is not a tract for economic communism. He shows this clearly at one point where the friendly thing is for the peasants *not* to demand more of Mohan's money although their needs, simpler than his, have grown acute. The only one of them who does give up friendliness for a simpler doctrine is condemned by his fellows, by Mohan, and implicitly by Mr. Myers.

With these as the new positive values, the opposing forces are seen in a different aspect; there is a change of emphasis. The rivalry of Salim and Daniyal is pushed aside—the end tied off as expeditiously as possible—because whichever of them succeeds to the throne the basic social and economic structure of the empire will be unchanged. It is that structure and its ubiquitous influence which Mr. Myers now sees as the enemy. Jali's growing acquaintance with it, his growing insight into both it and the weaknesses within himself which it plays upon, are an important aspect of his development. They are the material for a fine study of gently implied threats and immensely powerful pressures, seemingly impersonal, and applied almost imperceptibly.

The importance of these themes and the fine insight with which they have been grasped seem to me beyond question. Yet there is some way in which, by the exceptionally high standard of *The Root and the Flower,* this new novel is not completely satisfying. Perhaps there is not quite the same assimilation of the themes to the concrete situations; the characters, settings, and action can too readily be viewed as *illustrating* the theme. In *The Root and the Flower* the significance of the plot, even at its simplest levels of intrigue, is pervasive, constantly developing the thought and feeling of the novel. In *The Pool of Vishnu* the snatches of rather erratic action, such as Hari's intrigue to reconcile Akbar and Salim, have the air of accidents. Such events are of course interpreted in terms

of the theme, but one feels that they could have been replaced by others slightly different and nothing would have been lost; they are not inevitable. The amount of commentary and interpretation, mainly by the Guru, is rather large in proportion to the amount of doing and feeling and thinking by the characters—for, except occasionally (as in the fine interview with Akbar), the Guru is not fully a character but an onlooker and interpreter. Again, Mohan's experiment in friendship with the peasants seems a trifle artificial, too evidently devised for the sake of the theme. A smaller example of the same tendency is the patently allegorical situation of the vast Palace of Rajah Bhoj, hemmed in by slums but completely remote behind its thick walls. Exaggerating, one can say that this treatment permits the reader first to make up his mind about the truth of the thesis and then turn and judge the aptness of the illustrative story. In *The Root and the Flower* these two operations fused and were inseparable.

To make this criticism is not to judge the book by some special ' aesthetic ' standard or on the strength of preconceptions about ' the technique of the novel.' This slight tendency away from the novel and towards the allegory or parable matters only because it makes the author's point of view less conclusive and indisputable than it might have been. The thesis can be abstracted from it and its truth affirmed or denied. But in *The Root and the Flower* disagreement with the thesis would involve intensive reinterpretation of character, situation, and incident; the author's observations, his discriminations, his subtlest hints of attitude, would have to be challenged at innumerable small points. There is no other way of ' disagreeing ' with such a novel.

The attempt to locate this weakness of *The Pool of Vishnu* exaggerates it. Compared, say, with the plays of Ibsen or Shaw this novel has its abstract ideas deeply embedded in the matrix of full experience. Only in comparison with such a novel as *The Root and the Flower* does the assimilation of the theme to the novelist's materials seem imperfect. *The Root and the Flower* seems to me irreplaceable, as a great work of art is. For its development of thought and feeling *The Pool of Vishnu* seems the more important book; but it is one that might conceivably be bettered and in a sense superseded, if only by Mr. Myers himself.

D. W. HARDING.

MARXISTS AND HISTORY

THE ENGLISH REVOLUTION, 1640, Three Essays in Interpretation, edited by Christopher Hill (*Lawrence and Wishart, 2/6, 136pp.*).

THE ROLE OF THE INDIVIDUAL IN HISTORY, by G. V. Plekhanov (*Lawrence and Wishart, 1/6, 62pp.*).

The first of the books listed above contains three essays, written from the Marxist point of view, on different aspects of the English Revolution—' perhaps the most important event that has yet occurred in English history '—and of them Mr. Hill's is the one that most demands attention. Writing for a non-specialist audience Mr. Hill avoids most of the pitfalls of ' popular ' history, and, drawing on large resources of information, he orders his material in a remarkably workmanlike way. In some seventy pages he exhibits the social forces behind the constitutional opposition to the early Stuarts, disentangles the conflicts of interest and policy on the parliamentary side, and gives a lucid summary of the results of the struggle by which the economically dominant classes adapted the political organization of the country to their needs. If, in spite of these merits, one feels that the total picture is over-simplified it is not because Mr. Hill has in any way twisted the evidence that is relevant for assessing political action in general. It is rather a question of whether another kind of evaluation is not also necessary if the common conviction of the three authors, ' that an understanding of the problems and ideas of the seventeenth century will help us to solve the problems of to-day,' is to be justified.

My uneasiness centres on the use of the word ' progressive ' which, together with its complement ' reactionary,' is freely scattered about some part of the essay. (Progressive—the trading and industrial classes and those landowners who treated their lands as a commercial investment; reactionary—James and Charles, the Church, the gilds, and gentry who wanted to live in the old style.) Progressive seems to be used in three ways which ought to be, but are not, distinguished. As a neutral descriptive term it is applied to anything making for ' the full development of all the resources (*sc.* economic resources) of the country.' An intermediate meaning is found in the assumption that anything progressive in the first

sense was also progressive as representing an extension of the general good: ' the struggle of the bourgeoisie was progressive, representing the interests of the country as a whole;' and ' free capitalist development was of much more benefit to the masses of the population than the maintenance of an outmoded, unproductive and parasitic feudalism.' Finally the term is invested with a sense of general, moral approval: ' the middle-class struggle to shake off the control of this (court) group was not merely selfish, not reactionary, but progressive '; it was ' the essential preliminary condition of social and intellectual advance.'

No one is likely to deny that the struggle of the seventeenth-century bourgeoisie was progressive in the first sense; and since their attempt to make political forms correspond with economic power was inevitable we may understand the phrase, ' the historical necessity and progressiveness of their task ' (the collocation has important implications). Why, and in what ways, this movement was of ' benefit to the masses of the population ' is something that should perhaps have been explained. Since the progressive merchants and industrialists of the Civil War period were the direct ancestors of the capitalists of the eighteenth century whose outlook was expressed in such progressive maxims as, ' In a free Nation where slaves are not allowed of, the surest Wealth consists in a Multitude of Laborious Poor,' and, ' In a certain class of people too much well-being lessens industriousness and encourages idleness with all its attendant evils,' one cannot suppose Mr. Hill to refer to the immediate benefits accruing to the wage-earners as a body.[1] (Since Mr. Hill is certainly well aware of the effects of ' primary

[1]The attitude of eighteenth-century employers towards ' the laborious poor ' is well described by Heckscher, *Mercantilism*, Vol. II, pp. 152ff., from which the above quotations are taken. Heckscher remarks that in England in the eighteenth century ' there is no doubt at all that the State everywhere exerted its influence on the side of low wages and unfavourable conditions of work.' The degraded condition of workers in the rapidly expanding coal industry in the seventeenth century—an industry in many ways foreshadowing the more general economic developments—is described by J. U. Nef in *The Rise of the British Coal Industry*, Part IV, chapter IV.

accumulation ' on many thousands of workers, eloquently described by Marx in the twenty-fourth chapter of *Capital,* one is almost tempted to believe that he had in mind the ultimate benefits to mankind when the historical process, helped on by the seventeenth-century bourgeoisie, should have completed itself.) Even at the economic level the advance in productiveness brought attendant evils which, together with the beginnings of change in methods of work, in the status of the workers and in the simpler kinds of enjoyment available, should have qualified the simple formula. But even more disturbing is the way in which ' progressive ' in its third sense slurs over all activities not immediately connected with economics. Charles I's financial methods were corrupt and impossible, but why is it that a minor Caroline court poet like Carew (thoroughly representative of his class and its tradition) is so much finer than a minor Augustan poet like Prior? The old, semi-feudal agricultural order was bound to pass, but how was it that that order could produce *The Pilgrim's Progress*? (Mr. Badman, one remembers, was thoroughly progressive.) The English language necessarily developed in certain ways to meet the needs of an increasingly scientific and practical age, but what qualities were lost—and, since language is an index of deep-seated habits of feeling and observing, what was the significance of that loss—about the time of the Restoration? Mr. Hill may say that it was not his purpose to raise the issues indicated here, but consideration of them is not only important in connexion with the question of motive in the participants in the seventeenth-century struggle, it is essential if by ' the problems of to-day '—towards a solution of which Mr. Hill explicitly offers his essay—we are to understand not only political problems but the problems which lie beyond politics.

> ' It is struggle that wins reforms ' (the essay concludes), ' just as it is struggle that will retain the liberties which our ancestors won for us. And if the people find the legal system " not suitable to freedom as it is," then it can be changed by united action. That is the lesson of the seventeenth century for to-day.'

It seems to me that the lesson of the seventeenth century is a more difficult lesson than that, and to learn it we need to be aware of

many factors that the Marxist philosophy of ' historical necessity and progressiveness ' is content to ignore. Since I have no wish to incur a charge of ' bias against liberalism in general ' perhaps I may invoke here the name of that distinguished associate of the Commonwealth leaders and exemplary M.P., Andrew Marvell. There is no doubting Marvell's conviction of the inevitability of the major political movement of his time (' For men may spare their pains where nature is at work, and the world will not go the faster for our driving '), but it is a fact to ponder that his greatest poems draw on a tradition more closely associated with the ' reactionary ' than with the ' progressive ' side. The qualities of the historian who will bring out the full significance of the vast changes—economic, social and cultural—marked by the Civil War, should, one feels, include a sense of complexities such as informs that triumphantly civilized poem, *An Horatian Ode*.

Of the remaining essays little need be said. Miss Margaret James, in ' Contemporary Materialist Interpretations of Society in the English Revolution,' shows that some mid-century writers, notably Harrington and Winstanley, were aware of the relation between economics and politics. Mr. Edgell Rickword's essay on ' Milton: the Revolutionary Intellectual ' is a more academic piece of work than one would have expected, and it makes no attempt to relate the principles expressed in Milton's political writing to the sensibility expressed in his poetry. The claim, therefore, that it is because of his revolutionary principles that Milton's fame ' is still the battle-ground of conflicting interests, and each book about him tends to turn into a polemic with its predecessors ' is simply unwarranted dogmatism. Plekhanov's *The Role of the Individual in History* (1898) answers the ill-informed charge that Marxist philosophy reduces the function of the individual to insignificance. (*Cf.* Engels: ' We make our own history, but in the first place under very definite presuppositions and conditions. Among these the economic ones are finally decisive.') It may be remarked that the anonymous introduction to the present translation displays features which must often puzzle the non-Marxist reader of some Marxist writings. Plekhanov's essay is said not merely to deny a charge but to ' expose ' a ' slanderous argument '; it ' delivered a crushing blow ' to Narodnik (terrorist) theory, and three times in eight lines we are told that it ' shattered '—once ' utterly '—

various anti-Marxist arguments; ' our young people ' are required to read this ' obligatory text ' in order to ' combat the survivals of Narodnik and Socialist Revolutionary views.' It is odd to find a serious political theory presented in the language of a dissenting conventicle. Confronted with such fundamentally self-distrustful aggressiveness we are reminded not of Marx but

—Lord, hear my earnest cry an' pray'r
Against that presbyt'ry o' Ayr—

of Holy Willy.

L.C.K.

THE LITERARY LIFE RESPECTABLE

I. MR. EDWIN MUIR

THE STORY AND THE FABLE, by Edwin Muir (Harrap, 11/-).

' I was born before the Industrial Revolution, and am now about two hundred years old. But I have skipped a hundred and fifty of them. I was really born in 1737, and till I was fourteen no time-accidents happened to me. Then in 1751 I set out from Orkney for Glasgow. When I arrived I found that it was not 1751, but 1901 . . . I was brought up in the midst of a life which was still co-operative, which had still the medieval communal feeling. We had heard and read of something called " competition," but it never came into our experience. Our life was an order. Since the Industrial Revolution there has not really been an order except in a few remote places . . . To be born outside your age and have to catch up with it and fit into it is a strain. Yet I would not for any price have missed my knowledge of that first pre-industrial order; for it taught me something which is inherent in every good order.'

This is the conclusion of Mr. Muir's autobiography. It explains why the author is important for us: he not merely *is* that but he knows it. It is a wise book, it contains a good deal that is incidentally interesting and fruitful, but there is likely to be a general complaint: it is not the kind of book we expected. If written with another object, we may lament, it would have been an important document. However, Mr. Muir can hardly be blamed for writing

his own book and not the one we wanted. For of course when his autobiography was announced we looked forward to having that much needed section of literary history, that invaluable account of the central literary world in the formative post-war years, the era of *The Calendar of Modern Letters* and *The Athenæum*, Eliot's poetry and the early Virginia Woolf and all the rest, which hardly anyone but Mr. Muir is qualified to describe at once from the inside and yet outside the feuds and partisanships and social relations. The author of *Transition*, contributor to Orage's *New Age*, Murry's *Athenæum* and *The Calendar*, Mr. Muir was the best critic at that time of that phase of our literature; and his reputation since in every branch of letters—as the translator of Kafka, the critic of Scottish literature, incidentally poet and novelist, always, even when reviewing fiction for the B.B.C., notable for his integrity and his grasp of standards—has encouraged us to expect from his autobiography a contribution to literary history, something like an English equivalent to Malcolm Cowley's *Exile's Return* only much less ephemeral. But apart from an account of Orage there is scarcely an indication that the author has played a part in literature. It is not so much that Mr. Muir is unnaturally modest (though he does seem to be) as that he has chosen to conceal what is for most people their public and utterable life and reveal what is commonly the private and hidden existence; he gives us instead of his intellectual career an account of his semi-conscious and psychoanalytic experience. Disappointing for most of us.

There remains the account of his Orkney childhood, of that ' virtually self-supporting life ' with its roots in the soil and its peculiarly expressive speech-idiom based on ' syntactical feeling ' —a fine start for a writer. At fourteen he accompanied his family to Glasgow, which meant being ' plunged out of order into chaos,' ' a meaningless waste of inherited virtue.' After that he drifted from one horrible Glasgow clerkship to another. He was converted to Socialism and extended his reading, then suddenly it is let fall that he decided to marry. Neither of them having a job they went to London, and, we are simply told, met Orage whereupon Mr. Muir got simultaneously a post on *The New Age* and work for *The Scotsman* and *The Athenæum* (it can hardly have been as simple as that and we should like to have been told how it was done); and then just when the prologue seems to be over, down comes the

curtain on his literary life. We have only what he has published elsewhere to go by. No doubt the life of a man of letters is his printed work. We can draw some conclusions in spite of Mr. Muir's reticence. We can compare his achievements with those of literary men apparently more favoured in their origins.

Mr. Muir was born outside his age. What of those who are born very much inside it, at the social centre, and who instead of having to strain to catch up and fit in like Mr. Muir are effortlessly borne on the tide, who are by virtue of their environment convinced of their right to take the centre of the stage on which the arts exhibit (to give a choice of images, though perhaps the most felicitous is one culled years ago from Mr. Maurice Baring's autobiography: ' I had a seat under the dome '—Mr. Baring, the type of those born with a prescriptive right to literary success)? A good point of departure for such a comparison and contrast would be the Julian Bell memorial volume,[1] backed by such culturally related works as Cyril Connolly's *Enemies of Promise*,[2] Mrs. Woolf's *Roger Fry*, Lowes Dickinson's *McTaggart*, E. M. Forster's *Lowes Dickinson* (and we can expect to have richer documentation available in due course when another of the group gives us a *Forster*, when the David Garnett reminiscences appear, and when Lord David Cecil produces a biography of Mr. Desmond MacCarthy). It can hardly escape observation that the virtues of Old Bloomsbury—though even in their original incarnations, such as Lowes Dickinson, Forster and Lytton Strachey, dangerous weaknesses are apparent—were endangered from the beginning by being set in a social context. The ' centre ' that Mrs. Woolf describes Roger Fry desiderating for the arts and letters in London seems to have soon produced a little world in which social life made the exercise of critical judgment bad taste; every member accruing to the group became entitled to eminence as it were.[3] To be born outside any such group and to have to make his way by hard work and native endowment has its own reward for the man of letters—Mr. Connolly drops a hint: ' Critics in England . . . discover one day that in a sense their

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[1]Hogarth Press.

[2]Reviewed in *Scrutiny*, Vol. VIII, No. 1.

[3]See the ' London Letter,' by Raymond Mortimer in *The Dial*, March, 1928.

whole life is an accepted bribe, a fabric of compromises based on personal relationships.' One can see the kind of pressure to which *The Criterion* succumbed early on in its career and why the literary side of *The New Statesman* was foredoomed. Mr. Muir's merits are precisely that he sprang (like Lawrence and Hardy) from another kind of society. His literary criticism is distinguished by good sense, decent impartiality and personal judgment (not the glib currency of a social group), and impresses one with an integrity that comes from *not* being committed to compromises based, etc. The moral seems to be that the literary life respectable can nowadays only be lived outside the centre. To be a man of letters of any worth you must be a man of character too, in the sense that Hardy and Lawrence were. It was not after all ' a waste of inherited virtue ' when Mr. Muir left the Orkneys for the twentieth-century city, the inherited virtue was translated.

What is all this fuss about, I may be asked, what has the man added to English Literature that can be pointed to as of the first importance? Like Leslie Stephen and various other men of letters his value lies in what he stands for as much as in what he has done. I do not myself think much of Mr. Muir's fiction or of his recent book on *The Present Age*. But if you were to challenge me: Do I think Mr. Muir has contributed more to English letters than Mr. Desmond MacCarthy, Mr. Raymond Mortimer, Mr. George Rylands, Mr. David Garnett, the late Julian Bell, Mr. Clive Bell, or Lord David Cecil? I should unhesitatingly reply Yes, and more than all of them put together.

II. MR. GEORGE ORWELL.

INSIDE THE WHALE (*Gollancz, 7/6*).

Mr. Orwell unlike Mr. Muir belongs by birth and education to ' the right Left people,' the nucleus of the literary world who christian-name each other and are in honour bound to advance each other's literary career; he figures indeed in Connolly's autobiography as a schoolfellow. This is probably why he has received indulgent treatment in the literary press. He differs from them in having grown up. He sees them accordingly from outside, having emancipated himself, at any rate in part, by the force of a remarkable character. His varied writings bear an unvarying stamp:

they are responsible, adult and decent—compare *The Road to Wigan Pier* with Spender's *Forward from Liberalism*, which is a comparison between the testament of an honest man and a helping of flapdoodle.

Mr. Orwell has not hitherto appeared as a literary critic, except incidentally, but as a novelist, a social thinker and a critic-participator in the Spanish War. Now he has published three literary essays which, promisingly, are all quite different. One is an examination of Dickens, another an analysis on not altogether original lines of boys' school stories, and the third a piece of contemporary criticism. From his other books we could deduce that he was potentially a good critic. For instance, he takes his own political line—starting from an inside knowledge of the working-class, painfully acquired, he can see through the Marxist theory, and being innately decent (he displays and approves of bourgeois morality) he is disgusted with the callous theorising inhumanity of the pro-Marxists. His explanation (see pp. 168 to 172 of *Inside the Whale*) of the conversion to Russian Communism of the young writers of the 'thirties is something that needed doing and could hardly have been done better. And he drives home his point with a piece of literary criticism, an analysis of a stanza of Auden's *Spain*. Again, he has lived an active life among all classes and in several countries, he isn't the usual parlour-Bolshevik seeing literature through political glasses; nor is he a literary gangster, his literary criticism is first-hand. These are exceptional qualifications nowadays. Without having scholarship or an academic background he yet gives the impression of knowing a surprising amount about books and authors—because what he knows is live information, not card-index rubbish, his knowledge functions. A wide field of reference (provided it is not gratuitous), outside as well as inside literature proper, is a sure sign of an alert intelligence. While Mr. Orwell's criticism is discursive his pages are not cluttered up with academic ' scholarship ' nor disfigured with the rash of the exhibitionistic imposters who displayed in *The Criterion*. His writings are not elegant, mannered or polite, or petty either; his style is refreshing, that of the man whose first aim is to say something which he has quite clear in his head—like the pamphleteering Shaw without the irresponsibility (which produced the paradoxes and the cheap effects). He really knows the stuff he is writing about

(for instance, Dickens) and has not got it up in a hurry for the occasion (like Spender on Henry James in *The Destructive Element*).

This is his most encouraging book so far, because while his previously successful books have been *The Road to Wigan Pier* and *Homage to Catalonia*, not only timely but valuable in themselves, they had not seemed to lead anywhere. Mr. Orwell must have wasted a lot of energy trying to be a novelist—I think I must have read three or four novels by him, and the only impression those dreary books left on me is that nature didn't intend him to be a novelist. Yet his equivalent works in non-fiction are stimulating. It is the more evident because his novels are drawn from his own experience (*Burmese Days* is based on his five years in the Indian Imperial Police service in Burma, others on his experiences as a down-and-out and so on). Yet these novels not only lack the brutal effectiveness of B. Traven's for instance, they might almost have been written by Mr. Alec Brown. You see what I mean. He has even managed to write a dull novel about a literary man, which is a feat—an attempt to do *New Grub Street* up-to-date, but Gissing was an artist and Mr. Orwell isn't. What an impressive book Mr. Orwell made out of his experiences in the Spanish War (*Homage to Catalonia*), but that isn't a novel; in spite of its patches of spleen and illogicality, what insight, good feeling and practical thinking are revealed in *The Road to Wigan Pier* (for sponsoring which the Left Book Club earned one of its few good marks), but if it had been a novel one can't believe it would have been as stimulating and convincing. It looks as though if he would give up trying to be a novelist Mr. Orwell might find his *métier* in literary criticism, in a special line of it peculiar to himself and which is particularly needed now. He is evidently a live mind working through literature, life and ideas. He knows what he is interested in and has something original to say about it. His criticism is convincing because his local criticisms are sound (always a test), and though his is not primarily a literary approach he is that rare thing, a non-literary writer who is also sensitive to literature. Thus his criticism of Dickens, while a lot of it is beside the point from *Scrutiny's* point of view, contains nuggets of literary criticism (*e.g.*, p. 81), and you can see his superior literary sensibility on the one hand to the Marxist critics of Dickens (*pro* or *con*) and on the other to the Hugh Kingsmill type. He is not sufficiently dis-

ciplined to be a considerable literary critic, he is and probably always will be a critic of literature who, while not a Communist, has nevertheless corresponding preoccupations, but the great thing is, he has a special kind of honesty, he corrects any astygmatic tendency in himself because in literature as in politics he has taken up a stand which gives him freedom. He can say just the right things about Comrade Mirsky's nasty book on *The Intelligentsia of Great Britain,* he can tick off Macneice in a characteristic attitude, expose Upward's puerile theorising, diagnose Auden & Co., and ' place ' the school of Catholic-convert apologists. Even his enthusiasms—another test—turn out to be sound criticism. Thus, you may think that the only thing wrong with the title-essay of this book is that he seems to think Henry Miller a great novelist, but it turns out after all that he doesn't. He claims for *Tropic of Cancer* no more than that it is an example of the only kind of tolerably good novel that can be written now (' a completely negative, unconstructive, amoral writer, a passive accepter of evil ')—and expects, as you and I do, that Miller will ' descend into unintelligibility, or into charlatanism ' next.

Whether he will come to anything as a literary critic will probably depend on whether he can keep clear of the atmosphere of Bloomsbury and the literary racket. And there are other dangers. He reminds one of Mr. Robert Graves in his promising period in the 'twenties, and Mr. Graves's history since, from the standpoint of literary criticism, has been rather a sad one. Probably the best thing for him and the best thing for us would be to export him to interpret English Literature to the foreign student, instead of the yes-men who generally land the chairs of English abroad. Everyone would benefit; though one doesn't see him accepting such an offer. But one thing above all there is to his credit. If the revolution here were to happen that he wants and prophesies, the advent of real Socialism, he would be the only man of letters we have whom we can imagine surviving the flood undisturbed.

Q. D. Leavis.

PELICANS

YOU AND MUSIC, by Christian Darnton.
OPERA, by E. J. Dent.

These two little books are among the few really interesting introductory works on musical subjects that I've come across. As an engagingly written historical survey I do not think Professor Dent's book could be improved, and his historical references and parallels are so illuminating that I doubt if anyone, musically knowledgeable or otherwise, could read his book without enjoying opera more, or at least wanting to know more about it. The historical method has of course its limitations, chief of which is an implied assumption—not Professor Dent's, but perhaps the superficial reader's—that one can explain an aspect of an art by citing the historical reasons why it took the form it did. As long as one realizes clearly that Professor Dent's account of the relation between operatic gesture and ballet, and of the significance of the Handelian *ritornelli* (for instance), don't by themselves take us a step nearer to an aesthetic of the fundamentals of opera one can find them extremely valuable; and one has to admit that in its very unpretentiousness this volume is more helpful than most books (such as the Key to Opera reviewed in the last number of *Scrutiny*) which make more extravagant claims. Actually Professor Dent hardly touches on the question of Music and the Dramatic which I tried to discuss last June: by implication he does however indicate certain issues concerning music and the pictorial arts (or spectacle) which I might consider at some later date.

Mr. Darnton's volume is less successful than Professor Dent's but the task he has set himself—or has been set—is considerably more complicated. In less than 150 pages Mr. Darnton covers the physical basis of music, the nature of musical thought and musical forms, the history of notation and instrumentation, the relation between music and ritual and social function, the history of music from 1940 to 1100, the problems of popular music, of interpretation, and of active listening: so that it is not surprising that his book should appear at times somewhat cynical in its compression. I think its effectiveness might have been greater

if its information had been less dissipated, but it is free from all the usual prejudices and makes more of the salient points essential in the initial stages of a musical education than is customary in books of this type; it impresses one throughout as being the work of a real musician. Occasionally its simplicity may be deceptive, for I'm inclined to think that some of Mr. Darnton's most acute quasi-conversational remarks could reveal their full significance only to a reader with a degree of musical knowledge such as the author says he doesn't presuppose. But this is not a point of much consequence; this book, though it might have been less perfunctory if more rigorously restricted to fundamentals, has the right kind of enthusiasm behind it, and those who, having read it, have no desire to listen to the music it refers to, can hardly be said to deserve a musical education, anyway.

There is a helpful, if apparently arbitrary, list of gramophone records as appendix.

W.H.M.

WHAT IS ART? by D. S. MacColl.

MODERN ARCHITECTURE, by J. M. Richards.

I wonder why the Penguin Publishing Co. reprinted Mr. MacColl's book. He has a lively controversial manner, now elegantly ironic, now scurrilously abusive, and a good eye for the inconsistencies of others. But nearly half the book is ephemeral matter, interesting and useful enough in its day, which has been superseded—I do not know whether he first noticed ' the existence of " symbolic " and " metaphorical " elements in technique,' but this idea is at least implicit in most recent writing about art. The liveliest chapters for the contemporary reader are those in which he takes side against Roger Fry on Cézanne, the Post-Impressionists and others. The *advocatus diaboli* is always welcome and one agrees when Mr. MacColl refuses to admit excessive claims for their greatness, especially in the case of Matisse. He makes it clear that in theory he has no interest in mere realism, though I fancy most of the academic critics do that. Nevertheless his destructive analyses fail to convince. He describes pictures that are not typical or he cavils at details of others on mainly realistic grounds, saying that a serviette looks like tin or a hat is not on a head, which observations are either nothing to do with the case—to say that the serviette was

starched would be to admit his criterion—or not true or both. Cézanne sometimes stumbled but when he knew his path he went too far for Mr. MacColl: when the latter asserts, and rightly, that Cézanne owed something to Manet, Daumier or Millet, one has a feeling that he likes him best when he most resembles these predecessors. He is also a true academic of the older generation in his admiration for van Gogh and Gauguin, who are, though no one denies their distinction, the most obviously attractive Post-Impressionists. These arguments have their interest as art history, but I doubt whether they can give much help to the general reader and spectator, when he looks round for a guide through what Mr. MacColl calls the Chaos of Culture. I should have thought that one of the many surveys of twentieth-century art, coming up to near the present day, would have been a better candidate for wide circulation.

Mr. Richards' brief study has been specially written for the series and should serve its purpose well. It contains sufficient historical background, information about materials and methods of building and an interesting series of illustrations with brief critical notes. Mr. Richards' approach and outlook are well-meaning, if somewhat vague and oversimplified at certain points. One is pulled up with a jerk on reading:

> ' But this degree of pre-fabrication could only apply to types of building, such as the private house, in which needs are more or less standardised ';

but the intention, at least, behind the following is unexceptionable:

> ' Warmth and mellowness are qualities people have a right to expect of architecture, and architecture being a visual physical thing, no consciousness of the theoretical rightness of modern architecture would justify it if they were absent . . . .'
>
> ' People complain that modern architecture as they see it does not possess enough of the human kind of appeal. This is partly, as we have said, because it is unfamiliar; but it is partly that modern architecture concentrated to begin with more on achieving the discipline it obviously needed than on the complete range of expression that a mature architecture can afford to use. . . . It is safe to say that the next stage in the development of modern architecture will be towards its humanisation, chiefly

through the greater use of *natural* materials, such as wood and stone, and materials such as brick which mellow with time, and through the evolution of well-tried shapes and textures that have more character than the frigid forms of geometry . . . The idea has always been a human one, and it is natural that the widening of its scope (which is the outcome, really, of maturity) should come after the establishment of its rather revolutionary principles.'

Coming down to details, a few points occur that seem worth making. Mr. Richards severely censures the pretentious modernism of, *e.g.*, Shell-Mex House and the trivial flashy modernism often known as ' tea-shop,' but approves of the black glass *Daily Express* building which can only be called a combination of the two. We all agree now that Functionalism is not enough or else we have some enlarged definition of that term. Nonetheless the architects whom Mr. Richards and others approve of continue to design houses, factories and sanatoria in exactly the same way. The Gothic architects, so often, here and elsewhere, compared to our own, did not make houses look like fragments of cathedrals, though they may have used similar details in one and the other; a fifteenth-century manor house does not look like a Lady Chapel.

A far closer study than we have had up to the present of human needs and desires is required before a more satisfactory style can be evolved. Many issues are concerned and it is difficult to generalise. While the more austere kinds of modern architecture are a sincere attempt to cure the diseases of polyglot ' period ' styles, many of its more ornamental and bogus kinds pretty obviously indicate that the cure is inadequate. To regain good taste it is necessary not only to acquire an unprejudiced knowledge of modern needs and the means of satisfying them, but also a knowledge of modern failings, perverted satisfactions of genuine needs and genuine satisfactions of perverted needs. If Mr. Richards is right in his forecast one can be reasonably hopeful about the future.

G.W.

A SHORT HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE.

' B. Ifor Evans has compressed into a bare 200 pages the whole story of English Literature from *Beowulf* to *Finnegan's Wake*.

He does not attempt to prove a thesis, and he has no violent prejudices to air. His aim is to set down the essential facts, and to get ten centuries of well-known achievement into their proper perspective.' That is, Professor Ifor Evans has undertaken an impossible task, that of justifying another compilation of the well-known names and dates and the well-known kinds of odds and ends of descriptive commentary. What function can such a compilation be imagined as serving? There are no essential facts, and there can be no perspective, except from the kind of positive approach and with the kind of selective criteria that Professor Evans (in betraying terms) disclaims, or allows to be disclaimed on his behalf. This little book can make no difference to anyone, and it hasn't yet the period quaintness of Stopford Brooke's.

F.R.L.

All the above are ' Pelican Books ' at 6d. each.

ART HISTORY AND/OR ART CRITICISM

MODERN FRENCH PAINTERS, by R. H. Wilenski (Faber & Faber, 30/-).

I find this a difficult book to review. There can be few people who know more about the art of France during the last half century than Mr. Wilenski, and here he has marshalled a remarkable mass of information, much of it collected with great labour, about all French painting of any importance produced between the Salon des Refusés, 1863, and 1939; each section has a critical introduction; the bibliographical apparatus is extremely elaborate and the index most detailed. *Modern French Painters* should become a standard work of reference on the period, and one would like it to become a basis, either for Mr. Wilenski himself or for other writers, for separate studies of some of the topics touched on in the preface.

Yet in saying all this reservations must be made. In the historical sections Mr. Wilenski professes to have attempted ' a plain historical telling of the story ' rather than ' dramatised biography.' In fact he adopts the methods of the chronicler, recounting events year by year and giving lists of artists represented—and abstainers as well, in some cases—at the chief exhibitions. At its best this simple procedure is very satisfactory and one learns nearly all one wants to

know about the artists, their lives and environment; though there is plenty of gossip, there is no sentimentality of any kind and Mr. Wilenski is at pains to point out that most of the artists enjoyed quite adequate financial circumstances. One learns who have held artistic salons and who have frequented them, what cafés have been the centres of artistic discussion, which parts of Paris the artists have lived in, who the collectors and dealers have been, how the public have reacted to exhibitions and what the critics have written about them; the literary and musical connections of the art world are indicated and the political background sketched in at intervals. But it is a little disconcerting to find that the Parts and Chapters are labelled ' Acts ' and ' Scenes ' and that among their contents there are quite large areas of writing like the following:

> ' In the same year Octave Mirbeau bought a candlestick at the William Morris shop in London and had his money refused by Morris because he had written against Burne-Jones. Marcel Proust, aged twenty-five, published his first book *Les plaisirs et les jours* with a preface by Anatole France and illustrations by a fashionable flower painter called Madeleine Lemaire whose house, for reasons I have not discovered, had been wrecked by anarchists. Bergson published *Matière et Memóire*. Edmond de Goncourt died at seventy-four; Morris died at sixty-two; and Valaine died at fifty-two.' (p. 155.)

This reads for me like a rough draft for a Lytton Strachey to work up into just the kind of ' dramatised ' biography or history that Mr. Wilenski is rightly trying to avoid. One often seems to be shown glimpses of a vast ant hill inside which, and all over which, multifarious activities are going on, but to be given too few clues to their complex organisation for a real understanding of either the ant hill as a whole or its miscellaneous cells.

It is fortunate that in the main Mr. Wilenski has eschewed the Bloomsbury technique for which his more confused passages seem to be a preparation. On the other hand it is a pity that he has so largely shirked the genuine historian's task of selection and interpretation. In the Preface and at various points further on there is an extremely interesting survey of the main structure of cultural life under the Third Republic, the background of what Mr. Wilenski calls ' culture,' or original creative art, with which he is really

concerned. He praises the Third Republic, not for its patronage of art, its ' civilization,' which was concerned solely with ' derivative popular ' work flattering to the tastes and aspirations of the average educated bourgeois, but because it generously and intelligently left original artists to pursue their destinies alone. In this uniquely free position French artists have been dependent financially on dealers and dilettanti. On the whole they have been well-treated, though Mr. Wilenski points out the recurring time-lag between the newest developments in art and the taste of even the smaller and more actively interested collectors. The outline is there, but it is obscured by the quantity of details. There are too many facts of some kinds, *e.g.*, picturesque gossip, and not enough of others. One would like to know more about the opinions held in the various salons and cafés. One would like more than a mere outline, based on fuller quotation from representative critics, of the changes in taste during the period. Was there a general improvement in taste? The names of the artists employed in the decoration of the 1937 *Exposition* suggest that the preliminary generalisations about ' civilization ' don't quite apply all through. The reader is left to draw his own conclusions on such matters. Any competent reader can, of course, do this and one does not complain at being invited to think, but an almost equal emphasis on everything has an irritatingly anaesthetic effect and I feel that many items, such as lists of exhibitors at Salons des Indépendants, would have been less obstructive and also probably more rememberable, if put in appendices rather than in the text.

As a critic Mr. Wilenski reminds me of Mr. Wyndham Lewis. Both have a great deal of common sense and will have no truck with eccentrics or with philistines. Both have a forthright style and are never short of a satiric missile to fling at a favourite enemy. Both have certain general ideas of a ' classical ' nature about art and letters, which are sound on the whole but need continual modification when applied. Neither does this, and neither deigns to indulge in the detailed appreciation of separate works. *The Modern Movement in Art* had a great propaganda function for unfamiliar kinds of art when it was first published, but one now sees that it is very largely a brilliant arranging of counters: species and genera of artists, kinds of technique. Having admitted the individuality of every work of art, Mr. Wilenski goes on to compare

types of painting just like any neo-classic essayist on poetry comparing epic and tragedy. His criterion seems to me a queer mixture of one more esoteric than Mr. Bell ever dreamt of and that of the mere encyclopedic historian. He submits ' that a work of art of the architectural, romantic or descriptive kind has intrinsic value implicit in the attitude, motives and procedure of the man who made it and in that man's perfect fulfilment of his initial purpose of enlarging his experience in the work ' and that its ' acquired value ' for spectators is merely secondary. All original art would therefore seem to be of equal value, since presumably one man's sincere intentions are as good as another's. One cannot argue against this virtually historical outlook, one can only say that it is impossible to hold it consistently and that Mr. Wilenski never really has done and does not in the book under review. This remark on Toulouse-Lautrec's *Moulin de la Galette* is based mainly on a chronological standard:

> ' But both the lyrical classicism of Renoir's *Moulin de la Galette* and the grand, monumental classicism of Cézanne's *Les Joueurs de Cartes* are really finer and more of this period than Lautrec's picture which continues the drawings by Guys in the 'sixties and Degas' productions in the period covered by our Prologue.' (p. 83.)

but his treatment of Monet, Sisley and Pissarro as secondary to Manet, Renoir and Degas in the Impressionist movement is of a different order and he discriminates also with some care, on other grounds than those of mere originality, between the various manifestations of Surrealism. His term Neo-Surrealist is a useful label for those artists who use specifically Freudian symbolism as distinct from Picasso, Chirico, Chagall and others whose vision of the strange and fearful is less limited and doctrinaire. He makes a pertinent and amusing comparison between Breton's Manifesto of 1924 and Watts-Dunto's essay on Rossetti of 1883. In all these cases Mr. Wilenski is asserting that one sort of originality, one set of attitudes, motives and procedures, is more important than another, which, it seems to me, one can only do if one is thinking of ' acquired value ' and making personal judgments. This is a genuine critical activity. ' Comprehension of the artist's purpose and the extent of its fulfilment ' is only the beginning of criticism.

There is much in Mr. Wilenski's approach that one can immediately agree with, such as:

> ' There can, I think, be no doubt that the test of a critic is his ability to understand the original art of his own generation; because, if he cannot understand the creative activity of men with whom he has the best opportunity of contact, he is not likely to understand the analogous activity of men, now dead, who produced other forms of original art in other times and places.' (p. xii.).

One agrees also with his protest against the Post-1919 attempts to confine the term Art to works of a rather narrow aesthetic character. Nonetheless, the critical introductions are disappointingly scrappy. For the most part they describe subject matter and techniques and are thus scarcely distinct from the chronicles. Mr. Wilenski's principles tie him down to brief statements of preference or brief comparisons. One would like more commentary like the following:

> ' At bottom a passionate romantic, inspired in the first place by contacts with objects and organisms and phenomena, Picasso becomes more and more preoccupied as the picture grows with the new object, the new organism, the new phenomena which emerge at the dictates of his mind and hand. Fundamentally healthy, his art is sometimes calm and sometimes agitated, sometimes engaging and sometimes repellent, sometimes noble or tender and sometimes cruel or crass, sometimes detached and sometimes symbolically erotic . . . His *Femmes effrayées au bord de la mer* contains all Surrealism and carries it farther than any artist has carried it before or since . . . For Picasso is always a formal artist, absorbing attitude after attitude from his environment, forcing it each time to a climax, and converting it to formal art.'

but one would like it supported by analyses of appropriate pictures so that the judgments might be discussable. If, as Mr. Wilenski fears, there is a danger of egotism in such criticism, there is a greater danger of intellectual irresponsibility and, ultimately, atrophy in a too deliberate eclecticism. I hope it is unnecessary to add that I do not accuse him of the latter, which is the typical academic outlook of to-day.

GEOFFREY WALTON.

MACHIAVELLI

THE STATECRAFT OF MACHIAVELLI, by H. Butterfield (*Bell, 6/-*).

Mr. Butterfield's study of Machiavelli is something less than satisfying. The exposition is careful, the reference to contemporary conditions consistent and accurate; and yet, at the end of it all, the answer to the essential question—why we read Machiavelli—has somehow eluded us. This Machiavelli—so concisely, so economically presented—is viewed from Cambridge with a Liberal and mildly disapproving eye; he turns out, allowing for the scholar's superior detachment, not to be so unlike the Marlovian caricature. The truth is that Liberalism such as Mr. Butterfield's does not readily ask itself ultimate questions. It regards political thought either with scepticism arising from a conviction of relativity in all things or with faith in the inevitable unfolding of social progress; in either case it finds Machiavelli's estimate of political phenomena discouraging and distasteful. Machiavelli is too uncompromising, too absolute for Mr. Butterfield, who scarcely disguises his preference for the infinitely more flexible and unprejudiced mind of Guicciardini; but in preferring it he does not always do justice to that greatness of quite another order which Machiavelli certainly possessed.

Mr. Butterfield's book—to make the point more clearly—suffers from excessive concentration upon the Prince, upon his ruthlessness and cunning. It suffers, that is to say, from a false emphasis. The empiricism of Machiavelli, unlike that of Guicciardini, is the servant of a strictly personal interpretation of politics. Machiavelli is a political theorist led by circumstances to a deep consideration of political fact; and his practical advice, as Mr. Butterfield justly notes, suffers from the rigidity imposed by an inflexible mind upon intractable material. Machiavelli habitually reduces political conduct, which more often demands infinite tact and a continual adaptation to fluctuating circumstances, to a choice between precise alternatives. The Prince is told that his subjects must either be ' courted ' or ' extinguished ' (' bisogna o vezzeggiarli o spegnerli '), that he must either be successful and unscrupulous or virtuous and a failure: that the middle path, without saving moral credit, leads invariably to disaster. The appearance of detachment in these

observations is largely illusory. The alternatives exist less in the external world than in the writer's own experience. Machiavelli's logic, apparently so dispassionate in its findings, is really the servant of a mind which (being, as Mr. Butterfield remarks, " too much the master of what it has once assimilated ") expresses itself most naturally in rigid antithesis. This tendency to dramatise the conflicting and contradictory is mainly determined by his sense of the gap between inherited theory and contingent fact. Believing in the State as a necessary condition of the *vivere civile,* of the social existence of man, Machiavelli was appalled by the conditions of sixteenth century Italy and by his conviction—perfectly clear-cut and supported by a coherent philosophic outlook—of the political shabbiness of the human species. To bridge the gap between these facts, as they appeared to him, and the belief in civil institutions which they seem to nullify: to establish the body politic—threatened in his own time with crisis and anarchy—on a basis not merely theoretical but actual and strong: this is the real scope of Machiavelli's work. From it emerges the figure, clearly conceived and intensely dramatized, of the Prince.

There is nothing particularly original about Machiavelli's conviction of the necessity and beneficence of an ordered society. Dante, who had derived it from the Schools and so, ultimately, from Aristotle, assumed it in the *De Monarchia* and confirmed it through Beatrice in the *Paradiso*:

> Ond'elli ancora: ' Or dì: sarebbe il peggio
> per l'uomo in terra, se non fosse cive?'
> ' Si,' rispuos'io, ' e qui ragion non cheggio.'
> (Canto VIII, vv. 115-117.)

But Dante assumes that the civil order, besides representing a positive good on earth, was expressly created to anticipate the harmony of heaven. Machiavelli can make no such assumption. Writing in the *Discorsi sopra la Prima Deca di Tito Livio* on the origin of authority among mankind, he says: ' The variations of government grew up *fortuitously* among men, because in the beginning of the world, its inhabitants were few and lived for a long time dispersed *after the manner of beasts*; then, as they increased they came together and, in order to be able better to defend themselves, they began to look for the man who was strongest and of

best heart among them and made him chief and obeyed him. *And from this was born the knowledge of things honest and good.*' (Book I, Ch. ii.). Dante and Machiavelli agree—it is the measure of their common tradition—in associating political consciousness with ethical maturity: in almost everything else they are poles apart. For Machiavelli the various forms of government, which Dante had regarded as willed by God to play their part in the formation of the Christian order on earth, arose *fortuitously*. This was their greatest weakness: for what had been created by chance could equally accidentally be destroyed. At the heart of Machiavelli's philosophy—which he shared with most of his contemporaries—lies a conviction that development and decay are aspects of a single and, on the whole, declining process. The State, and the Prince in whom its authority is vested, are engaged in a continual struggle against Fortune—that is, against a temporal process no longer assumed to be purposive or dependent on a divine will. ' All human affairs '—observes Machiavelli—' are in motion: and, since they cannot stand firm, they must either rise or fall.' (*Discorsi* I, vi.). The unfolding of time, thus reduced to an endless repetition, inevitably deprives all mortal affairs of meaning. Degeneration faces all political institutions, and the problem of the civil order, already solved for Dante by his faith in the providential institution of the Empire, becomes the problem of the State and of the conditions, now wholly natural, of its creation and maintenance.

Time, according to Machiavelli, dissolves the fabric of a state by bringing out the inherent selfishness which the acceptance of public order had for a moment subdued. In the universe as Machiavelli conceived it the notion of man's natural tendency to good cannot even arise. Born dispersed ' after the manner of beasts,' his natural condition is a brief and unfortunate one in which unchecked ' appetite '—to use Shakespeare's word—leads to inevitable anarchy. It is only when circumstances have forced him into social relationships that he begins, almost as though driven thereto, to conceive of ' things honest and good.' For the author of the *Mandragola*—that strange comedy in which the clear-cut representation of vice is raised by its very dispassionateness to the level of greatness—man's original bestiality, so far from having been overcome by civilisation, stands out even more strongly in contrast to his social instincts. Man's evil will, in fact, distinguishes

him from the beasts:

> Non dà l'un porco all'altro porco doglia,
> L'un cervo all'altro: solamente l'uomo
> L'altro uomo ammazza crucifigge e spoglia.
> (*Asino d'Oro*, VIII, 142).

In such a world allegiance to the State, by virtue of which alone man is a consistent moral being, no longer depends upon the unclouded exercise of reason but is, at best, a precarious thing. Machiavelli's low estimate of human nature admits of no compromise. ' It is necessary that he who rules a state . . . should assume that all men are evil and that they will always exercise the malignity of their spirits.' (*Discorsi* I, iii). The maintenance of the *vivere civile* now rests first and foremost upon the desire of individuals to overcome this natural bias to evil. In this desire, this will, individual and State give proof of their qualities, of their fitness to survive, in a word, of their *virtú*. *Virtú* is, in Machiavelli's thought, the supremely dynamic quality in a world where the will, acting perforce apart from any conception of motive, can affirm itself only in effective action. To be, like Savonarola, whom Machiavelli condemned, ' a prophet without arms ' is to be ineffective and therefore lacking in *virtú*. For *virtú* is the capacity to act with decision, to impress one's character, otherwise doomed to extinction, firmly upon the impersonal flow of events. Its presence in the individual is measured by his devotion to the commonwealth, in the state by the firm maintenance of good and universally respected laws: for the law is simply the expression of the common will against party selfishness. And since the generality of men are given to selfishness, since their judgments are mostly to be respected only where ' life and property are concerned ' (*Discorsi* III, vi), the will of one man is often—though not necessarily, and certainly not ideally—needed to keep them together by the force of his own *virtú*. That man, in the special conditions of sixteenth century Italy, is the Prince.

Responsible acceptance of just laws is, then, the essential condition of the *vivere civile;* and Machiavelli is prepared to support any ruler who will apply ' strong remedies ' (*Principe* c. iii) where it has been refused. But this acceptance, to be truly responsible, must in the last resort be free: or at least, once imposed by

authority, it must be freely endorsed. Machiavelli, in accordance with his general view of man's political nature, treats liberty as something intricate and double-edged, a condition of vitality as well as a source of anarchy. For some states, including the Florentine, liberty is an intuitive necessity, sanctioned by long tradition and built into laws and established institutions. In the great speech in defence of their civic liberties which he puts into the mouth of the Signori (*Istorie Fiorentine,* Book II, c. xxxiv), Machiavelli is evidently moved by this intuition. His prose, assimilating itself to the great Latin authors whom he admired, gains grandeur and amplitude as he contemplates the rights imperilled by the claims of the Duca d'Atene:

> ' . . . avete voi considerato quanto, in una città simile a questa, importi e quanto sia gagliardo il nome della libertà, il quale forza alcuna non doma, tempo alcuno non consuma e merito alcuno non contrappesa? Pensate, Signore, quante forze sieno necessarie a tenere serva una tanta città? '

Yet even here the dynamic quality of Machiavelli's thought gives the notion of liberty a subtle twist. Liberty as a force, an affirmation of individuality, is inevitably dangerous. For it is a force, even in the apostrophe I have just quoted, which makes itself felt in opposition to force, which cannot tame it, and time, which cannot consume it: a force, therefore, which is by nature active and might easily overstep the curb of law. Machiavelli himself, who regards disorders as the inevitable offshoot of liberty, argues that they may be beneficial to a healthy republic; for out of the clash between the people and the Roman Senate arose ' not exile or violence to the detriment of the common good, but laws and orders ' (here he points to the creation of the tribunes) ' in benefit of public liberty.' (*Discorsi* I, iv). Yet from tumult and healthy disorder to dissolution is only a small step. Once the civilised, the distinctively human impulse, expressing itself in respect for laws whose justice is based on the common interest, is removed—and we have seen how transient, how exposed to change and circumstance this instinct is —liberty degenerates into licence and the commonwealth into a conflicting conglomeration of interests. The story of contemporary Italy was decisive on this point. The same Florence which had been so absolute in defence of its liberties, which had exalted them in its

laws and institutions, produced the factions which plotted against the Medici in the Congiura dei Pazzi and killed Giuliano because he stood in the way of their own ambitions (*Istorie Fiorentine* VIII, cs. ii-ix). Where liberty is allowed to grow into licence and self-interest wins in its continual struggle against the common good, freedom becomes a curse; and against this curse Machiavelli calls the Prince to apply his ' medicine forti ' for the renovation of the commonwealth.

In its external relations the civil order is equally subject to mutability. The Machiavellian state is essentially a body situated, rather like the atoms in the fortuitous cosmos of Lucretius, among a number of other bodies. Each body, in its turn, is composed of atoms, of individuals more or less unified by their respect for the laws which bind them together; but between these bodies there is, for Machiavelli, no conceivable law, no instinctive community to prevent the domination of the weak by their more powerful neighbours. Each body tends to affirm its individuality, its *virtú*, by encroaching upon its neighbour; for *virtú* implies, as we have seen, action, force, the assertion of the individual will. Once more experience reinforces the findings of speculation. With his eye on the ceaseless rivalry of the Italian principalities, Machiavelli concluded that the only feasible alternative for any state is to expand or to submit, to conquer or to be conquered. Once more he is placed in the position most characteristic of his thought—the dilemma. He is faced with a choice between states—such as ancient Sparta and modern Venice—which are small, self-contained, and therefore stable, and others—such as imperial Rome—which extend themselves by conquest over their neighbours. An ideal state, demanding from each individual a high degree of *virtú*, a willingness to subjugate individual interest to the common good, presupposes a small and closely-knit society, such as the city-state of classical tradition. But such stability is contrary to the workings of Fortune, contrary, therefore, to the nature of things. For the state must, owing to its position, exercise itself in conquest, in the domination of neighbours who would otherwise encroach upon its liberties: but each conquest brings into the body politic new and discordant elements. Success in warfare only postpones a fate which failure precipitates. The process of assimilating new bodies of people can, given administrative wisdom, win a great measure of success. But

only within certain limits. Ultimately, the essential homogeneity of the social organism is impossibly compromised. Thus undermined by its own action, it falls a victim to the fatal process of disintegration. Meanwhile, however, it has at least revealed the *virtù* which is in it.

Such, very broadly speaking, is the speculative background to the figure of the Prince. I have insisted upon it, rather than upon the Prince himself, in an attempt to supply what Mr. Butterfield's study most seems to lack. Machiavelli's Prince—it cannot be too often repeated—is, by his express assertion, concerned with the 'principato nuovo,' with the establishment of authority in a society which has lost its respect for the laws upon whose acceptance the maintenance of the *vivere civile* directly depends. The argument of the *Principe* presupposes a community which has lost the political instinct, which is unable therefore to live as a free republic. That, in Machiavelli's opinion, was the state of contemporary Italy, and the resolute action of one man—the Prince—was needed to reverse what seemed to be a pre-determined process of decay. Machiavelli sees his Prince, in fact, as engaged in a struggle against Fortune, and he justifies his 'extraordinary actions' only if they are undertaken 'not to ensure his succession, but for the common *patria*' (*Discorsi*, I, ix). Machiavelli's enemies in our days frequently call him a Fascist, much as they formerly called him a Jesuit or a poisoner, but it is difficult to say—assuming that the speculation is profitable—what he would really have thought of our present situation. Perhaps we should be better occupied in considering how far his spirit—or that part of it which, as the expression of an intensely individual outlook, is still relevant—can reasonably be applied to modern questions. Machiavelli's pessimism is of a type not generally sympathetic to the Liberal mind; but perhaps it might, without necessarily imposing its own point of view, correct in that mind a certain tendency to be complacent about the possibilities of human nature. In any case, to have achieved a dispassionateness far from devoid of feeling, to have arrived at so great a conciseness of definition without bordering upon the superficial, is to show a greatness that claims respect. Certainly with his insistence upon responsibility in the individual, Machiavelli would have found little to commend in régimes maintained in existence mainly by flood-lighting, loud-

speakers, and recurrent wars; whilst, with his estimate of man as a political animal, he would have found the vast assumptions often insufficiently covered by the word ' democracy ' scarcely comprehensible. Probably he would not have associated himself unreservedly with either side; but detachment is not always a sign of inferiority, and we at least—even in a time of crisis—might usefully meditate his conclusions.

D. A. TRAVERSI.

SCOTTISH LITERATURE

THE SCOTS LITERARY TRADITION, by John Speirs (Chatto and Windus, 7/6).

Mr. Speirs has attempted, with a fair degree of success, to give the reader approaching Scottish literature his bearings in a tradition distinguishable from that of England. There are qualifications that have to be made. (The virtues of Mr. Speirs's work will be known to those who have read the substance of this volume as it appeared in *Scrutiny*.) The economy of treatment which appears to have been a principal aim results in a certain scrappiness. One has the feeling of being taken on an efficient but rather hurried conducted tour, the items to be inspected being arranged and labelled a little too neatly. And, as after such a tour, one wonders whether more might not have been done if there had been less anxiety to get over the ground. Material that would have been more in place in a set of longer and more leisured studies of individual writers has found its way into the book. Any such study of a tradition must of course be enforced by particular analyses and discussions, but it would have made for smoother reading if Mr. Speirs had got along with fewer sub-divisions.

Right at the beginning there is an unfortunate result of this method of arrangement. The *Kingis Quair*[1] is not the most suitable work with which to open an account of the Scots literary tradition, though it is the natural one with which to begin a short history of fifteenth-century Scottish poetry. It is not so much a great Scottish poem as a fine poem that happens to be written in Scots, or in a

[1]Mr. Speirs's ' Quhair ' is apparently a slip.

literary dialect based on Scots (not the same thing as the literary Scots of Henryson and Dunbar, which is, as Mr. Speirs remarks, ' created out of a staple of " spoken " language.' The difference, which is, I think, clear to the ordinary reader, is confirmed by the linguistic experts). It is obviously connected with such English poems as the *Court of Love*, and the latest editor of the *Quair* inclines to the view that the Scots poet is the debtor. (If that is so, the ascription to King James is of course false, and the poem will fall quite late in the fifteenth century). Mr. Speirs is enabled to make some useful remarks on allegory in connection with the *Quair*, but he has virtually to make a fresh start with Henryson.

The detailed discussion which occupies most of the first part of the book offers little scope for comment. The ' rootlessness ' of Dunbar's ceremonial poems seems to be exaggerated, and in general Mr. Speirs is too apt to see vitality only in its more obvious forms. It is all very well to accuse Dunbar of failing to appreciate Chaucer, and quite likely we have to-day a juster picture of Chaucer's true greatness than his contemporaries and immediate successors had, but I'm sure it's worth while at least to try and understand what medieval writers meant by rhetoric, and why they laid such stress on it. After all, if Chaucer was to Dunbar ' the rose of rhetoris all,' for Chaucer himself Petrarch was he ' whos rhethoryke sweete enlumined al Itaille of poetrye.' No doubt medieval poetic theory is of very secondary importance to us. But I do think Mr. Speirs is too ready to condemn the ornate, or in its particular form the ' aureate,' in Dunbar, and that he underrates the *Golden Targe*[2]. He is however right to note how in treatment it points forward to Spenser. Altogether I find him less satisfying on Dunbar than on the other authors he deals with.

The arrangement of the book corresponds to the gradual drying up of the native tradition, and the first part ends with a number of

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[2]Which in any case readily breaks into the vividly concrete.

> ' New Acquaintance embracit me a while,
> And favourit me whill men micht ga ane mile,
> Syne took her leave, I saw her never mair.'

The way in which such lines grow out of the mood of the whole points to the need for a revision of Mr. Speir's verdict.

remarks on isolated sixteenth-century figures: Scott, Boyd, Hume, Maitland. The comments though brief are valuable both in themselves and as pointing out the extraordinarily fine and civilized achievement of which Scottish culture was then still capable in the persons of its minor poets. The state of affairs such poetry mirrors was paralleled in England in the seventeenth century but not as far as I know before, and certainly not since. Mr. Speirs suggests with reason that the masterly use of speech rhythms in Maitland is impressive 'a generation before Donne.' A similar comparison might be made between Scott and Carew; while Scott is obviously also the descendant of Dunbar—he is an eminently professional[3] poet, whose valuable achievements stand out against a background of elegant (and sometimes highly obscene) technical exercises. Hume on the other hand, most of whose work, apart from an interesting epistle in decasyllabic couplets, is extremely pedestrian, expresses in *Of the Day Estwall* what Mr. Speirs well calls 'a consecrated and holy enjoyment,' and as Edwin Muir has remarked 'foreshadows in the most curious way both Marvell and Wordsworth.'[4] A tradition that could enable a fairly slender talent to express itself with such purity was obviously worth preserving.

With the second half of the book we pass from national to dialect literature. Here a series of detached studies of outstanding figures (together with a short and not very adequate sketch of the ballads) is clearly all that could be expected. The last chapter gives a cautious appreciation of C. M. Grieve's attempt to make Scots again a vehicle for major poetry, and a rather isolated chapter treats *The House with the Green Shutters* with reference to the cultural situation it reflects. The pages on Allan Ramsay (whom it is surely an understatement to describe as having taken 'a practical interest in painting') illustrates how Scots was, even for a writer without first-class endowments, still a suitable medium for minor poetry—perhaps, because its demands were less exacting, a more suitable one than English (I think it could plausibly be held

[3]Mr. C. S. Lewis so describes Dunbar (*The Allegory of Love*, p. 251).
[4]*Scott and Scotland*, p. 66. The learned have, I believe, fallen foul of this little book. But it seems to me to contain much acute criticism, and indeed to give a clearer picture of the Scottish tradition as a whole than Mr. Speirs does.

that Ramsay's best work is better than any *minor* English poetry of the same period). On it could be built up the work of Fergusson and Burns.

The concluding chapters filling in the gap between Burns and the present day are of necessity pretty gloomy in their general tone. As far as actual literary achievements are concerned, they overstate the poverty of Scottish letters. I do not share Mr. Speirs's hesitation in granting the best novels of Scott and Galt to be 'very remarkable' (*Old Mortality* at least seems to me a great novel) and what about Hogg's notable and intensely Scottish *Memoirs of a Justified Sinner*? But a few distinguished works more or less are irrelevant to the general aridity of the cultural life Mr. Speirs has to deal with, especially in connection with *The House with the Green Shutters*. He surely, by the way, does an injustice to eighteenth century Edinburgh in attributing the professor, ' Auld Tam,' to that milieu. He obviously represents the Scottish Hegelianism of the late nineteenth century, and is no doubt drawn from Brown's own experience at Glasgow.

On the future, discussed with reasoned pessimism in the final chapter, this is no place to speculate. Here extra-literary considerations are clearly of decisive importance. We may perhaps hope that Scotland will be able to reorientate itself with the end of the epoch that has seen its cultural disintegration; it may be no more than wishful thinking to imagine that spiritual initiative in the ' new order ' will come from small nations, but at least it is hard to see where else there is for it to come from. Some remarks on pp. 259-60 of Edwin Muir's *The Story and the Fable* are worth consulting here for the reactions of a sensitive and patriotic Scot to recent developments.

Before leaving Mr. Speirs's book, I should like to refer to the laudable efforts of the Saltire Society to make Scottish classics more accessible. So far there have appeared selections from John Knox's *History of the Reformation,* from the *Gude and Godlie Ballatis,* and from the poems of Allan Ramsay and James Hogg (Oliver and Boyd, 3/6 a volume; 10/- for the set of four). More are promised.

J. C. Maxwell.

PETULANT PEACOCK

LETTERS ON POETRY, from W. B. Yeats to Dorothy Wellesley (Oxford, 8/6).

There were, I believe, two dominant motives in Yeats's life as man and artist: a profound faith in Aristocracy, by which he meant the heroic passionate spirit as opposed to the (to him) contemptibly democratic world of ' clerks and schoolmasters '; and a concern for ' custom and ceremony,' a social order in which artists believing in and living by that Aristocracy could find subsistence. He stood for these things because the Ireland in which he was nurtured preserved many of the aristocratic virtues of the eighteenth century; and he knew, with the pride and bitterness from whence springs the ironic delicacy of poise which is his verse's peculiar distinction, that these virtues were, except in his poetry, doomed. In all that concerned these values—their preservation or destruction—his emotions were as flexible as they were strong, his intelligence as alert as it was magnificent. For the rest, he just wasn't interested: and this is why, his world incarnated in his verse from *The Green Helmet* to *The Winding Stair* and his account of the process of that incarnation completed in his *Autobiographies,* his work was consummated and there was nothing left for him but repetition. His other activities—the Abbey Theatre, his politics (' the seeming needs of my fool-driven land '), his occultism, even the words-and-music campaign which revived so vigorously during his last few years—were in the last resort no part of his world but the refuge of his disillusion.

If it were possible to look at life from the top of the Winding Stair, through the storm-battered ramparts of the Yeatsian Tower, one might see that there is some justification for his condemnation of—it looks like an inability to understand—most contemporary literature. One might see that ' the worst language is Elliot's (*sic*) in his early poems—a level flatness of rhythm,' that Eliot is ' an interesting symptom of a sick and melancholy age ' who ' wrings the past dry and pours the juice down the throats of those who are either too busy or too creative to read as much as he does,' if one did not reflect that this poet might be, not symptom, but purgative. One might, perhaps, consider Wilfred Owen (' all blood and dirt and sucked sugar stick ') to be ' unworthy of the poets' corner

of a country newspaper,' and one might certainly find in Ezra Pound ' a single strained attitude instead of passion, the sexless American professor for all his violence,' if one were willing to ignore the poetry in Owen's ' pity,' the tragic implications behind (at his best) Pound's self-knowledge. No doubt one could also understand why poets who shared certain metaphysical preoccupations seemed for that reason good poets, for it is not so much that Yeats is wrong as that he sees only so much as he wants to see. In so far as he was, and is, a great poet his blindness is of little consequence; but when the roots of that paradoxical austere fertility have begun to wither, it induces a kind of inert despondency to realize how little Yeats had to offer, in his last years, in place of the things he contumeliously abused. For instance, I think this is probably true:—

> ' When there is despair, public or private, when settled order seems lost, people look for strength within and without. Auden and Spender, all that seem the new movement, *look* for strength in Marxian socialism, or in Major Douglas; they want marching feet,'

but is it very helpful to add

> ' The lasting expression of our time is not in this obvious choice but in a sense of something steel-like and cold within the will, something passionate and cold '?

We have heard of this ' poem cold and passionate as the dawn ' often before and in the Byzantium poems it meant something powerfully fine and compelling; but, as applied to his last work, can it be said to signify much except that he knew, but wouldn't admit, that it was time to give up the struggle? Now and again in these letters there is a glimpse of the old heroic fire:—

> ' One reason why these propagandists hate us is that we have ease and power. Your tum-ta-ti-tum is merely the dance music of the ages. They crawl and roll and wallow. You say that we must not hate. You are right, but we may, and sometimes must, be indignant and speak it. Hate is a kind of " passive suffering " but indignation is a kind of joy . . .'
>
> ' I said when I started my movement in my 25th or 26th year " I am going to stiffen the backbone." Bernard Shaw may

have said the same in his youth; it has been stiffened in Ireland with results. I am an old man now and month by month my capacity and energy must slip away, so what is the use of saying that both in England and Ireland I want to stiffen the backbone of the high hearted and high-minded and the sweet hearted and sweet-minded, so that they may no longer shrink and hedge, when they face rag-merchants like —. Indeed before all I want to strengthen myself. It is not our business to reply to this and that but to set up our love and indignation against their pity and hate . . .'

but even such passages, since they tell us nothing that the poetry and *Autobiographies* haven't said once and for all, have the ineffectual violence of bombs that explode at hazard long after their premeditated victims have taken refuge in their Anderson shelters.

When we reflect that the first part, at least, of the above quotation is directed merely against certain dolts, idiots, blockheads who had had the temerity to be mildly critical about the *Oxford Book of Modern Verse,* it almost seems that it wasn't only his poetry that, in these final years, came from ' rage and lust.' Outbursts of petty irascibility, coupled with a self-pity that is none the less morbid for being aggressively expressed, are acutely saddening when they come from a man who, being a great poet, would seem to have attained to wisdom and who, being also a national figure, had received all the honour and homage that the great, in these days, may reasonably hope for. But although this volume tells us little that we didn't know and a few things we'd rather, perhaps not have known, it would be unfair to close on a carping note. There was a kind of gloomy nobility in the rigour with which, to the end of his days, Yeats lived for poetry, and his great qualities—those which made him a major poet and probably the last representative of the old European Aristocracy—will remain unassailable by war or time. However vast, heterogeneous and international our culture may become, the world is a smaller place for the loss of him, his ancestral houses, the peacock on the stair.

W. H. MELLERS.

ANOTHER TIME, by W. H. Auden (Faber and Faber, 7/6).

One of the three parts into which this book is divided is entitled ' Lighter Poems,' but it is not in that part that Mr. Auden puts his poem on Edward Lear—along with his poem, this one diagnostic, on A. E. Housman (Mr. Auden has seen through Housman, who

Kept tears like dirty postcards in a drawer).

The ' Lighter Poems ' should have been kept for private circulation—if for any; for it took no talent to write them and they exhibit a pointless unpleasantness (see notably ' Miss Gee '). Here Mr. Auden is still adolescent. Of the rest of the book one has to say that, though the grosser crudities are less obvious than they used to be, he has nothing more like maturity to offer than before (though an exception might be urged in favour of one or two things, *e.g.*, XXXI and ' September 1st, 1939 '). The talent is apparent enough, and the inability to organize—to write a poem—equally so. There is the same vigorous mannerism of phrase and the same inability to command an intention capable of justifying the show of vigour. Mr. Auden's technique is not one that solves problems; it conceals a failure to grapple with them, or, rather, makes a virtue out of the failure. He has made a technique out of irresponsibility, and his most serious work exhibits a shameless opportunism in the passage from phrase to phrase and from item to item—the use of a kind of bluff.

That poised knowledgeableness, that impressive command of the modern scene, points to the conditions in which his promise has lost itself. We must still feel that he ought to have been a poet, but the possibility of development looks very frail. Perhaps however, he is more unequivocally conscious of his immaturity than before.

F.R.L.

MARXISM: A POST-MORTEM, by H. B. Parker (Allen and Unwin, 7/6).

This book will be reviewed in our next issue. Meanwhile readers will be glad to know that it can be obtained in a English edition.

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